

Picking up the Pieces

Jim slammed the door so hard it sounded like the hinges were about to fall off. Not knowing when these episodes would happen was one of the scariest things about it. It has been seven months since the accident. Seven months felt like seven days ago to me. The doctor told me that it should get better with time. Every time he tells me that, his voice becomes more and more like a ringing in my ears. It should get better with time? So there is a possibility the brain damage has caused a streak of anger that's not temporary? That possibility is something I think about every time I dare to look into his eyes, a swirl of sky colors—his eyes--the only thing that was the same about him, since the accident.

I could hear the pounding footsteps getting closer to my room. He barged through the bedroom door, along with grunts and mumbles.

“Hey honey,” I said with a cheery cover and tinted smile.

“Why is it that my dad thinks he can say whatever he wants to? Like I don't know, he reminds me ‘I oughta find a job again! And think about the kids’, he tells me! I've been looking and I 'm 32 for crying out loud! He needs to mind his own business,” he yells.

“People are just concerned for us, ya know? Once you find a job, your dad won't be so worried. Let's just take it one step at a time.”

He yelled profanities and knocked over the chair in his way. He never used to curse until the accident.

“Please, Jaime! You even said that my dad never cares! So are you really trying to take his side now?”

“Of course I'm not. Jim, please...don't talk so loud. The kids are asleep.”

“You are just great at making me feel better,” he said, his voice reeking of sarcasm.

I miss how he used to be and what we used to have. Of course I am grateful for him still being alive, but it's all different. The times in which we used to laugh and joke have become fewer and fewer and he rarely plays with the kids.

I flash back to when I got the call after the accident, explaining why my husband was late for dinner that night. “Mrs. Miller? I am so sorry to be telling you this but your husband has been in a head on collision and has been rushed to the Georgia Express Hospital in critical condition,” I remember them saying. I felt like a city that had just been struck by a hurricane. I was trying to convince myself that none of it was really happening.

The doctor told me the condition of his brain and the effects brain damage has on people: such as memory loss, anger, and depression. He has had the effects of all three. Because of these drastic changes, my husband has become a stranger to me now.

In the morning our two kids, Sam who is almost two and Harry who is 4, sat playing with their toys on the table with Jim. Every time I left our two kids alone with him I couldn’t help but worry. Sometimes I just had to get things done, though. I walked over into the next room and the overwhelming sight of clothes in the laundry basket stood staring at me. Dipping down I grasped Jim’s cotton shirt to fold.

A smash came from the dining room and exasperated yells followed. Juice was dripping off the side of the table and Jim’s newspaper was soaked.

“How many times have I told you to play somewhere else!? Answer me! Look what you did!” Sam started wailing and Harry ran to me, digging his face into my sweater. They didn’t have to say they were scared. It was written all over their youthful faces. They wanted to please Jim, always.

“Jim...Don’t worry. I will clean it up. Please don’t get so mad. It was just an accident.” He stared at me for a moment and then got up and left through the front door.

“Where are you going?” I said softly.

“To get a break.” That was becoming an answer I just had to accept.

“I didn’t mean to knock over his glass, mommy,” Harry whispered.

“...and I didn’t want to make him mad,” he added

“I know, honey. I know,” I said, my voice fading. Working so hard to console everybody else, I was ready to admit that I needed just as much comfort.

When we got married, one of the things I loved about him was that he was so kind-hearted and slow to anger. I knew he would be a great dad, as I soon found out when we had our

first son Harry. But I fear what our children think, now. They are too young to understand the reason for his outbreaks and they did not get much of a chance to know the amazing qualities he had before this. I had truly never met someone so long-suffering and patient.

Debt was creeping up on us rapidly and house bills were something becoming impossible to pay. Every time I walked through the living room I feel my stomach sink, catching glimpses of the colossal stack of bills, in the form of burden. I always worry that if he doesn't get a job soon then we will have to move out.

Step by step I found myself trying to pick up the pieces of our life, trying to fix the damage we were left with. Finding a job was the first step in helping him get better mentally and to support our household.

The doctor had said that the best thing to do was to go back and find your normal routine. Eventually it will jog his memory and there is a greater chance the effects will cease.

Glancing down at the paper on the kitchen table, I searched through it to see if there were businesses that were looking to hire. I took the blue highlighter and thickly circled the possibilities. I placed the newspaper on the stained wooden table where he sat, every morning, to drink his strong black coffee.

Then I headed back to the room and got into bed. I convinced myself to try to get some sleep and that he would soon be right beside me. Just as that entered into my head, so did he, through the bedroom door.

"I am leaving early tomorrow morning to go to some job interviews so I might not be home until late," he said right before I fell asleep.

In the morning I got up at eight to make the kids breakfast. I saw the paper still on the table, open to the ads section. There was a round coffee stain at the edge of the paper so I figured he had noticed the jobs I had circled.

I took the kids to school and came then came back home to clean. Cleaning the house by myself got to be a lot of work. I was so used to having the help of our cleaner, who we had to let go of when Jim lost his job.

Pretty soon I heard the front door open. I always sort of cringed, not knowing if he would be in one of those moods. But the door didn't slam shut. Jim walked into the kitchen and for the first time in awhile, he came in wearing a smile.

“Guess what! I found a part-time job,” he said as he walked towards me with his arms out- stretched.

I hadn't felt his hug for weeks and he gave me a gentle kiss which was even more foreign to me. I could feel a foreign smile creeping up my face, forming creases in my cheeks. At that moment, I had that wonderful feeling of hope that just maybe we were going to be okay and that the pieces were slowly coming back together.