

Sometimes I’ll turn on the news and hear about a terrible event. It might be a tsunami, an earthquake, a hurricane, or some other disaster that tore apart an area and left people with nothing. The news reporter will talk about how the Red Cross raised some money, how people were sent out to help those injured, and then they’ll wrap up the story and tell you the weather forecast. That’s it.

I have constantly wondered what it’s actually like to be in a situation such as the aforementioned ones. What happens after the cameras stop rolling? Those people you see on your screen; what happens to them? Their whole life from that moment forward was changed. But yours just keeps on progressing, following the same boring routine. They never get such luxuries.

It was those news stories I thought about when my mom told me what had happened. I remember that day like the back of my hand because I never stop reliving it.

I was doing homework at my desk and someone tapped lightly at my bedroom door.

“Brielle?” it was my mom.

“What is it?” I sighed, more than a little annoyed because of how much she bothered me.

The door opened and I knew my mom was walking into my room because of the old, rickety wood floor creaking. That stupid floor sounded like a woman in labor every time your small toe simply brushed at it.

“You know how I feel about you barging in here and...” when I spun around in my chair I stopped midsentence. The pained look on my mom’s face told me that now was not the time to be getting angry.

I’ll never forget the look on her face that day. It was so sad. Growing up, whether you admit it or not, you look at your mom as indestructible and strong. You look at her as someone who is always sturdy and always knows what to do. My mom’s face that evening disposed all of those traits.

I looked down so that I didn’t have to see her face.

“Your – ” she choked over her words and I could hear the tears that she wanted to cry but wouldn’t. She didn’t want to cry in front of me.

“Stop,” I said, shaking my head and blinking back tears. But it was useless. Trying to hold them back made my eyes feel like they themselves were the Hoover Dam. The pain in her voice, the pain in her face...the signs told me everything I needed to know. Everything I did not want to know. Everything that would make my world come crashing down.

“Dad’s dead,” I said numbly.

I think that was the moment that it hit us both. My father, her husband, was dead. He had left for war and would never come back. We both started sobbing. She pulled me close to her and for once I didn’t push her away.

“I’m sorry, Brielle,” she said through her tears, “I’m so, so sorry.”

From that moment up until now it feels as though I haven’t stopped crying. Days dragged on and on and I didn’t bother keeping track of them. What was the point? They were all the same anyway. Each day was a blur of tears and screaming, sadness and anger. Living on this earth, but not really being alive.

His funeral is tomorrow and I don’t know how I’ll be able to go. How I’ll be able to fully accept that he’s gone. All of the hope I had that he’d come walking back through the front door, ever since that fateful day he left. All of that hope is gone.

I sometimes still expect it, which is very weird. Sometimes I feel as though he’s going to open the door again and come in with that big smile on his face, in that camouflage uniform of courage, and wrap me and my mom in his arms.

“My two girls,” he would say laughing,

There are so many thoughts running through my head that if I had one wish, it’d be to turn off my mind like a light switch. If that could happen, I would never turn that light switch back on. I would never think again. It’s too painful.

I picked up the phone and dialed Kayla’s number.

“Brielle!” she said, answering before the first ring even finished. “Oh, my God, where have you been? It’s been forever! Everybody at school has been asking me where you are and we seriously thought you were like dead or something! What’s going on?”

“My dad,” I said, biting my lip, “he...he died.”

“Wow, that’s terrible,” Kayla stuttered, “uh, I really don’t know what to say. I’m sorry. Are you okay?”

Ever since he’s died, I have absolutely *hated* the phrase “I’m sorry.” It’s started to sound like what the person’s really saying is “I’m sorry your life sucks but I hope you get over it soon because I don’t like dealing with all of this.”

“Brielle, are you still there?” Kayla asked. “Listen, I really am sorry, but you shouldn’t be that upset. You’re one of the lucky ones.”

“What do you mean by that?” I bit my lip again, trying to hold back tears. “Are you trying to say I’m somehow lucky that he died?”

“No! No. God, that’s not what I meant at all,” she was plain out tripping over herself now. “I meant you shouldn’t be that upset because you had known in advance that something like this could happen. When he went off to war, you had to know that he might not come back. Wouldn’t that make things a little bit easier than if you had no idea at all?”

I quickly slammed the phone down and started crying uncontrollably. How could she ever think that this would be easy for me? Kayla, my best friend, of all people should’ve known how close I was with him and how hard this would be.

What hurt the most was hearing that I should’ve seen this coming. When Kayla told me that it made me feel stupid instead of helping me, which I like to believe was her intention. It made me feel stupid for thinking that everything would be okay; for thinking that he’d actually come back unharmed. Overall, though, what Kayla said made me feel stupid for having hope. It made me angry and upset at the same time.

Why should I be treated like I’m childish for having hope? If having hope means that you’re childish or immature, I guess I’m not mature. I guess I’ll never be mature if that’s what it means. Shouldn’t you always have hope regardless of your age? If becoming older means losing hope, then I never want to grow up.

As the days before went, today was no different. I fell asleep tired from crying, tired from thinking, into a sleep filled with the most beautiful, happiest nightmares I’ve ever known.

It’s amazing how quickly a good dream can turn into a terrible nightmare. I used to dream about him coming home and it would fill me with happiness and, in a way, confirm that it was good to have hope. Now I dream of him coming home and it fills me with pain. It is a beautiful nightmare when you think about it. A soldier coming home, what could be happier? Especially when it’s your own dad who’s that brave person. It is a nightmare when you know that soldier will not ever come home.

The next morning I felt myself being shaken and my eyes fluttered open to see my mom’s face.

“Brielle, come on,” she said, “it’s time.”

And then she walked away, leaving me to pick up my shattered pieces on my own.

I slumped out of bed moving at a pace that a snail wouldn’t be envious of and managed to put on clothes and get out of the house without crying. All I felt was numbness, which I suppose was a step up from breaking down in front of everybody, which is what I really felt was going to happen.

Since I hadn’t particularly walked around for a couple days, when I stepped out of the car my body felt like it weighed too much for me to carry. I wanted to curl back into bed and sleep until this whole thing was over.

The first person I saw was my aunt, right outside the church, who greeted me with a huge smile and an even bigger hug.

"Wow, Brielle!" she exclaimed. "You look great. I’m so sorry for your loss, but you look like you're handling this very well."

I wanted to laugh at that statement. "If only you knew," I wanted to say with a smirk. But instead I smiled and kept quiet, too afraid that opening my mouth would open the possibility of crying and not being able to stop.

When the service started I thought about those stories on the news. The ones about natural disasters that change a person’s life forever. I couldn’t help but think that my dad dying was my disaster. Like those people, I felt hopeless. Like those people, my life would never be the

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same. But unlike those people who encounter shocking life-changing events, it felt like I had no help. Where was my Red Cross? Where were the people sent out to help me, the injured person?

When you hear those news stories, the victims of the event at least cross your mind and might even stay on it for a bit.

I wasn't crossing anyone's mind.

I wouldn't care if the news story on me was only five seconds long while people waited for the weather. It'd be nice just to have a person, any person, who cared.