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# A COLLECTION OF MOMENTS

Sophia Reichelt

## THE START

I was born in a town that had one stoplight. One stoplight and a store that barely covered the five food groups in their inventory. We had a bar that sold burgers and at least three churches, so everyone had a place to be on Sunday mornings.

Sunday mornings looked like children in their best, walking hand in hand with their parents through pews filled with the devout population of the community and people waking up outside the bars, stammering home to their recliners and televisions. My Sundays were spent in my bed wondering if Mom would make us get up for mass. The short answer was no, she won't. And the long answer is she'll be too tired to get us ready, but she'll say it's our fault for not getting up and showing the initiative.

I liked Sundays at home. Dad always cooked potatoes.

## MY HOME

I remember car rides to Grandma and Grandpa's. Four hours: my siblings in the row behind me, two of them sitting on either of my sides. Mom and Dad had been ignoring us since we left the house; they would play every radio station I wish hadn't existed and that added to the mountain of irritation starting at my feet. We pass windmills; I remember the fields of massive metal soldiers all moving in unison, pawing at the air.

My youngest brother kicks the rhythmic interlude to every song on the radio into my lower back. One and a two and a three... I start to feel the rhythm in my head, pounding behind my eyes. My sisters beside me fight over which movie to watch on the screens in the headrests of my parents. It has always been *Hercules* or *Sleeping Beauty* and at that point I would not mind in the slightest if Aurora took a trip out the car window to get her beauty rest. Their fighting envelops the car and soon both my parents are turning around to cease all the bickering and bring equilibrium back to our minivan. I remember wishing in that moment that there

was no yelling and no feet hitting my back repeatedly. That for once our family could rest in silence.

I realize now that wish was childish. That I was greedy to take all that time with them and only let irritation fill my head. I am in my own car now and there is no one to speak, no one to yell. The radio plays songs I have never heard and there is no sense of normalcy behind their rhythms. My head pounds, but it is from the lack of caffeine and nicotine I have ingested. No one sits behind me or beside me and all that is in front of me is a long road. A very lonely road.

## ALONG THE WAY

There have been many roads I have driven down on the way to finding this place. One road was gravel, fields of wheat on either side and dust poured into my rolled down windows. There's antelope grazing in the ditch and I wonder if they'll even be alive this time next year. Will I? That is the road I try to forget.

Another road was along a mountainside and surrounded by pines and wildflowers. Ahead is the weeping wall. I have placed my head under the streams of water that flow down the rocky cliffs many times before. Mountain goats jump and kick and I still haven't found how they keep their balance. This is the road that showed me stability.

A road I remember is one that leads to the lake. The water is warm and I can see my feet treading beneath me in ripples of blue. We drink root beer and laugh about my fear of fish.

They say, "Why fish?"

And I tell them I don't know.

The ripples of blue remind me of the uncertainty of the bottom, and I think, this is a road I will leave in the past for a while.

## THE CAT

We found her at the shelter by the clothing store you loved. You said we could go in and look, but we weren't bringing anything home. I agreed with the sheer excitement of just saying hello to each one. There was a hall of plexiglass paneling, faces of fear, joy, and exhaustion behind each staring back at us.

We got to the end and there was a face unlike the rest. The face looked battered and worn; exhaustion was a word inadequate for what

lurked behind those eyes. I turned to you knowing the answer. Knowing this cat that looked like it was hit by a train, maybe two, was not coming home with us. But you smiled. You smiled and nodded, and I picked her up knowing she would never be without love again. We brought her home and she lay in your chair. She slept for weeks and then finally moved to look out the window.

She moves from the recliner to the window once a day. Her collar says Patches but we call her Mama Kitty. I often wonder if she'll be here when we have kids, if they'll hold her the way I did when we brought her home. Or if she'll be a mound of dirt in our yard that we can all lay flowers on once a year with a marker that says MAMA.

## THE SONG

There is an arch of branches and flowers I found and picked in the meadow and guests are finding their seats on the grass. You're up in our room finishing your hair, and my sisters help me zip up my dress. I look down at my feet, they're dirty. I spent the morning setting up the chairs and decorations in the yard. I didn't wear shoes, I guess I never wear shoes. I could wash them, but they'll just pick up dust and pebbles as I walk to you. I promise to wash them before we crawl into bed tonight.

My dress is on, my hair has been curled, and I'm standing on the porch facing our family and friends when I hear the door behind me open. It's you. You're wearing the outfit we found in the store by the shelter, and your hair is pulled back leaving two curls framing your face. Your feet are covered in leather dress shoes that remind me of the 1950s. We smile at each other and begin walking towards our family, hand in hand.

I never thought I would be here for this moment, never thought I would get to hold your small hands in mine and say that I'll be around forever. Forever and always, a song that repeats 'til we too are in a mound in the yard.

## WE BRING HER HOME

The hospital smells like rubbing alcohol and latex gloves. The nurses all mill about from room to room taking breaks in between to eat a salad or go outside to light a cigarette. We are sitting in the waiting room, I'm rubbing my hands together and taking shallow breaths, you're on your phone looking at the recent listings for antique rugs for our living room.

We have been here since 5:00 a.m. It's nearing noon and my stomach makes noises that I cannot silence.

Around 3:00 p.m. a nurse calls our names and escorts us down the hall to a room mark 213B. We enter and see her: our girl. We have been waiting nine months for this moment and it is finally in our reach. The young girl hands us the little bundle that is to be coming home with us, and we both cry. Nothing could have prepared me for the moment I finally looked into her eyes and knew that we would watch her grow into the woman she was always destined to be.

We send well wishes to the family that brought Esther into this world and allowed us to be her parents. I see one single tear roll down the young girl's face and I cannot tell if it is falling from joy or longing. We leave her in the hospital bed to recover and carry Esther out to the car. We buckle her in, turn on the radio, and drive. It is finally the part where we bring her home.

## OUR HOME

"I want to know why."

The sky above us is blue and I can hear birds in the trees to my left. Our house sits on the hill behind me. The garden is finally growing, the animals have all been returned to pasture, and the picnic blanket from our breakfast this morning still lays spread out, absorbing heat from the heavy sun rays beating down.

"You want to know what?" I ask as your feet bring you closer to the gate at the bottom of the hill. You won't turn towards me and I can tell that there are tears welling in your eyes, by the way your body slightly shakes.

"Why things are the way they are."

"Well, there are infinite answers to that question. The breakfast this morning was cold because I had to drag you from bed. The electricity went out at the beginning of the month because we forgot to pay the bill. The sun sits in the sky because if it were any closer it would, unfortunately, melt off our skin. We live in a place untouched by the outside world because I cannot stand the sound of traffic; but if you're asking why our world this morning was bombarded with news reports of violence, hate, and ignorance, I don't know that I have the answer. I do not know if it is a "why" things are the way they are or a "how" things got to the way they are, or if the how or why even matters. I'm afraid that people are

forgetting to care or maybe they don't know how."

I finish talking and at this point you've turned around to meet my eyes and I see one single tear roll down your cheek. You cross your arms to hold tight at your sides at an attempt to stop the sobs that shake your frame.

"I cannot take one more story of a life cut short, and I cannot handle any more statistics about the time we have left on this dying rock in space." Your hands are at your sides and I see anger in your face for the first time this week. I wanna say, let's run away or our world is here, not out there, but I know that's selfish. The world on the TV is our world too and I can't let us forget that those lives cut short are names we need to remember, and those statistics are what is gonna help us save this rock in space that we're on.

So instead, I say, "If you can't take one more story, let me take it for the both of us, and if you need a moment without statistics, I'll read the papers. The world can wait until tomorrow, but morality cannot. So, when you're ready, we will watch those stories and read those papers, and then we will decide what we have to do to make the outside look like the inside of those four walls."

You grab my hand and I lead us back into our house where the cat is in the recliner and our daughter sleeps in her crib by our bed.

## DINNER

I learned to cook from my great-grandma Sue when I was 11. Her frail hands would point out key factors and ingredients in each recipe she had perfected, and she would talk for hours about what food was good at what time of year and what you should make for parties and potlucks. I never went to any of those or hosted them for that matter, but I appreciated the sentiment.

The kitchen is where I can find peace at the end of a long day. I tie the apron my wife bought me for our two-year anniversary; it is embroidered with flowers and swirling lines that remind me of the time I spent traveling in the Andes in college. I always start by reading the recipe, finding every minute detail, like Gram had taught me. My ingredients are strewn about the counter and I'm turning the stove on when I see tiny feet pad across the tile flooring and stop at my own.

"What're you doing in here my love?" I see her little face turn up to mine and smile.

“I want to cook too Mama.” I remember the times in the past I would try to teach my four-year-old small tasks in the kitchen and it ended in flour on the floor and us crying over spilt milk. I wish I had the patience of her other mom, and I wish I could guide her along never once feeling frustrated, but it’s hard. I take a deep breath and remind myself of her tiny hands eager to help, and I grab the stool from the dining room.

“Come here my love, let’s make dinner for Mom.”

## THE END

Time always passed in a way that felt like the moments after your alarm went off and you’ve fallen back asleep to awake and it’s midafternoon. I can’t always remember how we got from there to here, or how so much happened without me noticing. It is just me now and the house feels like not even a draft has passed through it in years. The love of my life passed two years ago, and Esther works in a hospital on the east coast. She writes to me and calls every Wednesday, but I know she’s busy building her own life and I don’t resent her for that. Mama Kitty lived until Esther was five, and we never got another pet after her.

I miss the days when we had tiny feet on the hardwood, and cat paws in the flower beds around the house. I miss Sundays with my mother and father, and car rides with my siblings. I miss the first moment I laid eyes on my love and the day we said, “I do.” I miss cooking for our family and cleaning flour off of everyone’s faces when baking went awry. I miss the nights spent dancing on the hardwood and the days when I would hold you and shield you from the world.

I can’t always remember how we got from there to here, but I know it was heavenly. I loved it all to heaven.