

*From Rae's Story*

RAE, 30. a lost woman.

RAE

My father died when I was twenty. He was fifty-nine, had cancer, had a rottenness that grew up out of him. Out of his liver I think. He used to drink a lot. And,--he got sick in the end, I think it ate him from the bones outward—tore at, no it didn't tear at him, it just erased him piece by piece from the inside.

And I was... my father loved me. Whatever I might have thought about him, whatever I might have said, all the unkindness I sent his way in life, he loved me. Unquestionably. And he... he did the best he could. He tried so hard, and when I was young and I would wait for him to come home from work so I could jump on his back, and he'd walk through the door, there was a step right next to the door from the garage so my sister and I could wait there, and we would jump straight from that ledge—we would hide, we used to hide right behind the wall, we would hide and wait, and hear the garage door open, and his car would pull up, and that was the best sound in the entire world, that was worth every... every second of being awake in the day was for that sound, and we would—he would step through and he'd already be smiling cause he knew we were waiting there, and we'd jump—and crawl around on his shoulders—and where did that go? I mean, what, happened to me so that I didn't do it anymore? What happened to me that I didn't feel the need to express that kind of love anymore? Why does... why does that happen to you? Why do you feel the need to withdraw and... you know, we would, every day—we would be there, and he's gone... you know, he's gone—and I remember the buzzing churn of the garage door, and you could hear the thud of the wheels once they got in the garage, and his car would stop, and then you'd hear the door slam shut, and you'd wait, and the door would open, it would swing in, and he'd walk in, all huge in those days, you know, like... like he was bigger than anything, and he was then, he really was, and we'd jump—and my Mom would be there, with us, smiling, and we were a family of some kind of storybook, and she'd be standing there, and I know now that she was so happy because we were so happy, and that was her life and our life together, and his, and we were perfect in that way—

Why did we stop? What was it that made us just... not care about it anymore? And maybe that's when they stopped caring as much—and... you know, it got so quiet in that house sometimes, and it wasn't like there was a fight or anything, it was just a fading, and he loved us so much, and we loved him, and he would smile so big when he walked through that door, you know he was waiting for it, you know it just made his day, to come home to that, to realize that all the rest of life was stupid and worthless next to this joy, that his kids would be hanging on him as soon as he walked through the garage door.

And it wasn't enough. It dimmed. And then we were just people living in the same house. And that was it. And then there was yelling, not much, but... you know, still, it was apocalyptic when it happened—and I'd see his eyes grow dark, he had black eyes, and large eyebrows, and... they would storm over, and that, that same face that held with

it every promise in the world, all the wisdom and knowledge that I could possibly imagine, just became this uncomprehending animal to me.

So he went. And he was no longer the giant he used to be—and I didn't care at the time, and so when it... when I first heard the news, when I knew he was... sick, it wasn't there. I just... there was a... what, a pride, maybe? Is that what it was? That... fate had decided to visit catastrophe on me in order to test me? And how sick is that? That I would... my first reaction was almost pride at it, that this man, who had, who had lived for me, for me, was dying, and all I could think of was what it meant for me. And I was angry, too, because it meant that there wouldn't be as much money for me to go to college, and there wouldn't be as much free rides, and my mother would have to go back to work, and... my sister, and there was so much work in it—and... and I didn't even realize how disgusting it was that I would be thinking those things. It didn't occur to me to think that perhaps this was not all about me. That perhaps there was a man, who I didn't know, who was fading; what goes through your mind then? Because it was a protracted falling—it took six months for him to die from that... and... what did he think when he looked at me? Was he proud?