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The Sound of My Rose

I sat on a brown aluminum folding chair holding a single lavender rose. I stared intently at the mound of soft dirt that had become my father. All my memories and moments and seemingly meaningless conversations I ever had with my father raced through my mind like an old picture show film festival. I was sitting as tall as I could because my dad and I were a proud pair. He made me promise him that when his time had come, I would hold my head high with a dry eye. I was wearing a black flowing dress to my knees that draped over the sides of the cold hard chair. The thin sharp heels to my dress shoes pierced deep into the green moist grass. I sat alone twirling my single rose between my fingers. I broke off all the thorns and leaves in an episode of uncontrolled fidgeting. Soon I would have to leave this naked rose with my dad's grave, and in doing so, I would have to realize and accept that I would never see him again.

I remember sitting on my father's knee and feeling safe as I cuddled into his chest. My father was a rough looking man with skin like sandpaper, and he almost always had a five o'clock shadow at any time of the day. His hair was dark and wavy and a little puffed because he never put any product in it. He usually wore baseball hats. He had big, round, brown eyes that were deep and meant business. He was a semi-tall man with a stout build. This is the image that will remain in me forever even though he was almost unrecognizable after he became ill. He became thin from lack of appetite, and bald due to repeated chemotherapy. In the end, he was

frail looking as a result of everything. His round eyes never changed except they were a little softer now. I remember how his time on Earth was cut short not even two years ago.

There was a time in my life when my father would sit me on his lap and say to me, “Roro, you need to grow up to be an independent woman.” I don’t know exactly what brought upon these words but he continued, “The only person you can depend on is yourself. Don’t just depend on other people or any man because they won’t be around forever. People are unreliable.” Little did I realize that these words would stick with me for the rest of my life. The most unsettling part is when he would say “Don’t even depend on me, Roro, because I will not be around all the time.” As an eight-year old I came to the conclusion early on that I was alone. People will let me down and it’s up to me to pick myself up and make my success a reality. I have to work hard to get what I want out of life.

Surprisingly, my first let down and my first heartbreak was a result of my father. When I turned fifteen he left my mom and our family for another woman. Their relationship lasted a couple of years and ruined the relationship and respect I had for my father. For two years I did not speak a single word to him. I remembered how he had warned me not to depend on or trust anyone, including him. I never imagined he would show me this life lesson first hand. I was deeply hurt and affected by this time in my life. Slowly, I began speaking to my father again and we began rebuilding our relationship, but about a year later I found out he was ill. From that point on we began to grow even closer than before.

My first serious boyfriend lasted about three years. I fell madly in love with him, but we were both so young and those voices were taunting me. I could hear the forewarnings of my father in the back of my head telling me to be independent. I refused to let my boyfriend disrespect me or allow myself to need him. He hated how independent I was and wanted me to

need him, but I fought the urge. One night he had a little too much to drink and crossed a fine line. The next day I received a dozen beautiful long stem roses with an apology on the card and a sober excuse. This was the first time anyone had bought me roses, but it was only to say “I’m sorry.” I just wish once in the three years we were together he could have sent roses to say “I’ve missed you while I’ve been in school in Georgia” or “I love you” or “just because.” Our relationship did not last more than a year after this incident, but it was my second biggest let down since my father. Although the relationship withered, I kept those dried up dusty roses long after he had gone.

I received a couple more roses throughout my years, but from admirers who I only wished to stay friends with. Usually my bouquets were lavender because that is my favorite color. Attached was usually a small card to express their feelings toward me and what they would like to be. Although flattering in all their beauty, these gifts of nature only brought to my mind a reason to doubt and distrust everyone. I began to invest time into a hard work ethic at my job, my school work, and making a social life for myself. I did not want the trouble of going through another let down or heartache.

Love finally came back to bite me. By this time, I was a single mom with a lot on my plate. I continue to hear my dad’s voice pushing me to work harder and just stay focused on me and now, my son. I met this wonderful guy by chance and he seems too good to be true. Our relationship is the best relationship I have ever had in my entire untrusting life. It is filled with so much respect and admiration for one another. My son adores him and he even sends me lavender roses in heart shaped vases “just because.” Slowly, my father’s voice whispers in the dark corners of my mind, “Don’t depend on anyone but yourself, Roro,” but I easily ignore it. There were times I should have listened to my father’s warnings, but I am glad I didn’t this time.

This man I dated taught me that it is possible be myself, independent and strong, and still be able to let someone else take care of me on occasion. There is someone out there who won't carelessly let me down. There is someone who will send me these beautiful lavender roses that look like silk, smell like perfume, and sound like my dad. He even cuts off the thorns so I don't poke myself.

As I say farewell to my dad one last time, I delicately twirl this thorn-less lavender rose in front of me as I continue with my daydream. This rose represents all the lessons my father inscribed in me and all the lessons I have come to inscribe in myself. I can be careful with my heart and still be open to love. I can be independent as a woman, but it's alright to need someone and ask for help when I need to. It's alright to work hard for everything I want, but also to remember to smile and reward myself as well. I am truly my father's proud daughter. I slowly stand up and my shadow falls over my dad. Tears silently flood my eyes and blur my vision. I gently toss my naked rose on top of the pile of soft brown dirt. I leave my dad with my love, my respect, and my thorn-less lavender rose. In return, I take with me all his love, his respect, his being, and a broken smile on my heart.