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### State

I couldn't believe it. The man that ran next to me when I first learned to ride a bike. The man that helped me train every day to become a state soccer champion and keeps training with me for my up-coming state game. The man that ran marathons every month, was lying in a bulky hospital bed limp and motionless. I could barely recognize him because he was so still and quiet. I had always seen him constantly active and pushing himself harder. When we went to the gym I could always spot him because he was the one sweating more and pushing himself more than anyone else. Now it looked like he could be pushed over by a feather. He was fragile lying there surrounded by darkness. The only light was a dull yellow beam coming from the old florescent ceiling light and the flashing lights from all the wires and machines hooked up to him.

I feel my mother's hand on my shoulder rubbing my back ever so slightly. I turn around and see her red blotched face and red swollen eyes. She had been crying but had tried to hide it from me by placing her brunette bangs over half of her face. I could see the pain in her face even when she was trying to be strong for me. Her face that used to tell a million and one stories looked silent and dead. In an instant I am collapsed on the floor. I wasn't one to cry, but this wasn't fair. So my mom and I sat and cried. We sat together on the cold vinyl flooring.

My dad and I were jogging home after a long and hard Thursday night workout. The street had no street lamps and the darkness was interrupted by the headlights of scarce cars. I could barely hear his controlled breathing over my huffing and puffing. He was pushing me again and I couldn't be more grateful. Another car passed. The rev of the engine was normal and familiar. Again another car passed and another. The constant flow of cars was unusual for this street. Another pair of headlights hit my back and rolled past us. But this one sounded different. Instead of the smooth sound of the tires gliding across the pavement these tires squeaked and thumped. I turn around to express my confusion to my dad. But all I saw was a lump in the road.

The car had passed and it's light left with it. I sprint to the lump and slowly it gains the form of my dad. I panic! He just lays there with no indication of what to do. He would look like he was asleep except for the uncomfortable twist in his left leg and the sharp bend in his neck. The look of pain on his face scares me and I quickly call mom. Being 17 I should have known to call 911 immediately, but my fear took hold and left me in a state of disbelief. My mom got there and was frantic as soon as she stepped out of the car. She had called 911 right after she hung up with me. She rushed over to my dad and placed his head in her lap careful not to bother his neck. She was stroking his head waiting for the ambulance to reach us. After what seemed like hours the ambulance got to us. It screamed in with all their sirens and lights blazing down the dark street. They put my dad on a stretcher and told us to follow them to the hospital.

The night was getting colder so we make the decision to stop by the house first to get warmer clothes and to let the ambulance go without us. As soon as we arrive at the hospital, my mom rushes in before me while I stop at the bathroom to compose myself. When I finally reach my dad's hospital room I see my mom pacing outside. She tells me to go in and nothing could

prepare me for what I was about to see.

His leg was propped up in some sort of sling hanging from the ceiling and his neck was surrounded by a big hefty neck brace. His tender face was scraped from the top left of his forehead across his face down to his chin. Bruises scattered his face and his left eye was bloody and swollen. He was asleep. Whether it was from the drugs the doctors gave him or if it was natural tiredness I don't know. He just looks like a body rather than my dad. He seems so distant, yet he is right under my hand.

I can't take it. I don't believe. I want to stay by his side, but I need to get away. My mom calls our neighbor to drive me home. The car ride was silent. I got out of the car and was silent. I get to the side door of my house and decide to give a small wave of thanks to my neighbor before she backs away. I walk upstairs and climb into bed, not waiting to take my shoes off or change in to pajamas. I don't sleep. I stare into the darkness of the room. The only image that I clearly still remember was the look of pain in his face through all his scratches and bruises.

Morning creeps in my room. I look out my window and the sun is hidden by the clouds. The clouds cover the vast sky above me as it threatens to soak the ground below. I don't bother getting out of bed to get ready for school. Instead I continue to lay there only to be disturbed by my mom opening my bedroom door. She comes in slowly and gently and makes her way over to my bed. She sits down at the foot of my bed looking straight ahead at my dresser against the wall. She looks as if she is getting dragged down by a stronger force than gravity. Gracefully, she shakes my leg urging me to get up and eat. I then realize that I haven't eaten since lunch yesterday and the hunger beats the tiredness, so I get up. She puts her arm around me as we walk down the stairs towards the kitchen.

"How are you doing?" my mom asks in a quiet raspy voice.

"I'm fine," I mumble even though we both know I'm not. "What about you?"

"It's hard," she responds. I make that the end of the conversation sensing tears in my mom's eyes. We finish our breakfast and wait for someone to tell us it's ok to get up.

Thankfully the phone rings and my mom gets up to answer it. It's a short conversation and I see my mom processing it all. I see her trying to figure out what information to tell me and what to withhold.

"Your dad is doing well. He just woke up for the first time and was very confused, but the doctors were able to give him some sense of direction. They recommend we come to see him this morning to ease his confusion," she explains. I get up to go to my room and get ready. My mom is at the front door waiting for me. Again, another silent car ride. When we get to the hospital we can easily find my dad's room and move there swiftly. Half of me, the half filled with fear, doesn't want to go back into that room, but the other half of me, the half filled with over-flowing love for my dad, wins and I enter the room.

He turns his eyes the best he could at me and smiles. His left eye was still swollen but open and his neck still surrounded. There was a big bump under the blankets by his left leg which I assumed was a cast. His eyes look welcoming, so I moved towards the bed and sat down on the foot of the bed by his right leg to make sure I wouldn't bump into his cast.

"What's up bud?" he asks as if nothing is wrong.

"Nothing." I say but feeling I should say something more than that I continue on. "I am so sorry. I shouldn't have asked you to work out with me that night," even though he always came with me to all of my work outs. "I should have told you there was a car coming, or ran beside you rather than try to push us both harder, or called 911 sooner or..."

"Jess, you couldn't have done anything about it," he interrupts me, "it wasn't your

fault. It was an accident and accidents happen. I just wish it wouldn't happen before your big game." He was referring to the upcoming state game this Tuesday afternoon. Ever since I started playing soccer, he was there at every game. I mean every game. He would cancel meetings if it meant missing one of my games. I never asked him to do it, but he didn't need an invitation because when I play I reflect all the hard work my dad has pushed me to accomplish.

"A game is a game it doesn't matter now." I tell him knowing I won't get away with it.

"A game is a showcase to show yourself that the hard work is worth it," he says, quoting some inspirational book he has probably read a thousand times to squeeze every last bit of advice out of it for me.

"And a leg is something that isn't meant to be broken," I retort trying to make it sound like it came straight out of his book. He laughs and shakes his head as if to wave the white flag, and he allows me to be right this time. I am glad to see that this injury didn't put any pause on his personality. I just then notice that my mom has been standing in the corner by the door watching us. When our eyes meet, she walks towards my dad and I and cautiously sits down on his left side. We stay there for a little longer until my dad falls back asleep and then we make our quiet exit.

The whole weekend is filled with soccer practice so my mom gives me the keys to dad's car so I can drive to practice and work out while she stays in the hospital with my dad. On Saturday and Sunday, I don't see my dad at all. Both days I planned to see him after my final practice but as soon as I got home my drowsiness took over and I would fall asleep on the couch only to wake up when my mom came home at the end of visiting hours.

Monday was a drag. Waking up and having to face all those people who knew nothing about what I had just gone through was a hassle. My best friend Colleen, I call her Cole for short, started chatting up a storm about all the latest gossip. I didn't pay much attention. I just heard a bunch of "Well, apparently she likes him but he likes someone else but she doesn't know that," or "So she said this about her and then she starting yelling at him." It was all a bunch of nonsense, but Cole was into that sort of stuff. At the end of the day, I went home to an empty house. It didn't seem like I was home alone for too long because the next thing I know, I am woken by my mom coming home from the hospital.

I feel guilty that I haven't visited my dad yet but I always ask for a detailed explanation on how he is. My mom tells me that his leg is healing very well, but his neck is showing very little progression. That was something we never got in detail about. Both of us knew what would occur if his neck couldn't heal properly. It was an unusual circumstance because his neck was so badly broken, yet he could still move his legs and all his body, except his leg of course. With his neck broken it wouldn't have been unusual to become paralyzed. He hadn't demonstrated any of the symptoms for paralysis. So my mom and I tried not to feel nervous but his neck wasn't healed yet and there was always that fear of him becoming paralyzed. Instead of worrying about the 'ifs' we agreed to worry about what we knew for sure. My 2016 Oregon State Soccer Championship Game. Doesn't that name just sound regal, almost as if it was the announcement of a royal wedding? Well, it does to my family and me. It is as important if not more important to us than the royal wedding of two people we have never met. The most important game of the season would be played without the most important person in the audience. My dad. The doctors told us he wouldn't be allowed to leave the hospital for a long time depending on how quickly his neck heals and unfortunately a couple days wasn't long enough. I couldn't even imagine how different this game would be without being able to look up in the stands and see my dad giving me the best advice I could ask for in a game. His smile

always pushed me to forget that last mistake or gave me the confidence to push harder on the next possession. Without it, I was afraid my mental game would be in shambles and I was afraid that I would let my opponents get in my head with their taunts. But I had to stay focused.

Tuesday came and the school day flashed by. The day had gone so fast I didn't have time to think about my nerves. I had a large pre-game snack with my mom at a local café and was off to my game. By the time we got to the field, my nerves caught up with me. My mom had noticed and tried her best to ease them even though that was usually my dad's job.

"It's going to be okay sweetie." She almost whispered because she had not yet found the right words to say. "Yes, your dad isn't here but that doesn't mean his thoughts aren't with you and all his words of advice are gone. They are still here and as present as ever," she continues, gaining more confidence as she speaks, "He has led you to this point and now it's time to show yourself all the work pays off. You need to forget about the hurts right now. You have time to worry about that later. Right now it is about you and your team. So suck it up buttercup and play your game." It wasn't what I was expecting to hear, but it worked and my feelings turned from nerves to excitement.

"Thanks Mom. That helped a lot." I respond with the only words I can manage after that lecture. We are parked right outside from the gate around the field and I know that it is my cue to leave.

When I get on the field all my worries start to float away and I begin focusing on the game ahead. When warm-up ends, my coach gives us a few words of encouragement and advice to get us ready for the game. It starts like any normal game with the referee's whistle and a kick-off. The first couple minutes were just the ball going in and out of our possession. We couldn't get any momentum but neither could the other team. It was a back and forth game for a while. When, finally, one of my teammates, playing defense, booted the ball to our offensive side and it was my ball for the taking. I received the ball perfectly and started dribbling down the field following the white painted line on the grass. My shot line clears up and I take advantage of the perfect moment. I kick with all the precision and strength I have.

I didn't feel the ball hit my foot. In fact, I didn't feel my foot hit anything, What I did feel was my back hitting the ground. In all of the excitement I didn't see the other player running right behind me. I got hit and I got hit hard. I lay there for a second until I see the referee standing over me and I jump up realizing I can't show too much pain or else I will have to sit out. The referee buys it and rewards me with a penalty kick. I get lined up and feel the adrenaline build up. I kick and I miss. Again. For the rest of the first half I can't get my momentum back. I created turnovers and I missed the goal every single time. When the halftime buzzer goes off I couldn't be more grateful.

Half-time is a wreck. I zone-out during my coach's speech and can't focus on anything rather than my mistakes. I start getting emotional thinking of my dad and wishing he were here. I have to pull it together if I want to win the game, but I don't know that I can. When we come back on to the field I look in the stands for my mom, but I don't see her. Right before the kick-off, I look again.

The happiest thing in the world catches my eye. A wheelchair. A wheelchair with a man with a funny looking thing wrapped around his neck and a delicate woman pushing him around. My dad had come to watch my game.