

THE ABSENT CLUES

A DAUGHTER'S SEARCH FOR HER
VANISHED MOTHER

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My eyes shot open. It was December 31st, the morning after my 32nd birthday. I could tell something was off right away by the lacking smell of bacon and coffee I woke up to every morning.

I slowly sat up in my bed and rubbed the sleepiness out of my eyes. I wondered if Mom was sleeping in that day, which was very unusual for her. Maybe she was ill. I stood up out of bed and went to use the bathroom.

I entered the bathroom and took a glance in the mirror. The glance quickly turned into observation, as I saw the skin around my eyes looked to be sagging a bit. Crow's feet were forming. I realized I was really starting to age. I started to feel ashamed to be living with my mom at the ripe age of 32. I should have gotten further than this, I should have more to show for my life.

"Whatever." I whispered to myself before heading to the toilet.

After washing my hands, I made my way to check on my mother and see if she was feeling okay. I walked slowly across the soft, carpeted hallway. Pictures were hung so neatly down the walls of the hallway, memories of being younger with my siblings flooded to my brain with

every passing picture I saw. I sure missed those days. Everything was so much simpler. Life was enjoyable.

I took a right turn and faced my Mother's bedroom door. I knocked as always, out of respect for her privacy, but I did not hear her answer. I knocked twice more. Still, nothing. I slowly turned the knob of the door and opened it to a crack.

"Mom?" I said, still not entirely opening the door. "Mom, are you in there?" I asked, with a little more concern in my voice. Still no answer. I opened the door all the way at that point, only to find an empty, unmade bed, and curtains blowing gently in front of an opened window.

"That's odd," I thought. Maybe she woke up early and left the house for some reason. I decided to get ready for my day despite my missing Mom. After all, I had work to get done. A lot of it. I made my way back to the bathroom, this time to shower.

"This house is really starting to get old." I said to myself as I noticed rust on the shower knob and the bit of grime on the walls that I could never seem to get fully cleaned off. I washed myself in a haste while I was thinking of everything I needed to get done. I didn't have a "real" 9-5 job like most put together people my age, but I did run a small business. A very small one at that. Things were rough and slow for me at that point in time. I was still trying to make a name for myself and prove what I had to sell was worth the price I asked.

I got out of the shower and dried myself off, and continued my daily routine of brushing my teeth and putting on facial care products.

After I dressed myself, I headed out of the bathroom to start getting some work done.

I sat down at my work table, and started to get my supplies out. Every day, I would work for hours to make beautiful pieces of jewelry. At least, or so I thought they were beautiful. They didn't seem to sell much at the time, but I was very perseverant about being successful. I needed to be successful at something, just one thing so I could be proud of myself for once. Dropping out of high school was not my proudest decision, and I had absolutely nothing to show for the life I've lived. If I could run a successful business, I felt I would feel accomplished of myself for the first time in my life.

It felt like mere minutes before I checked the clock and realized 4 hours had went by. I got so lost in the choker I was making, I only then realized I hadn't eaten anything yet. Then, I remembered my missing Mom. My heart sank a little. This was very unusual for her. My Mother was such a homebody. I took after her in a lot of ways. From being relatively anti-social to the little hobbies I picked up throughout the years. She loved to work with her hands and owned her own small business, which was much more successful than mine.

"Where could she have gone?" I thought to myself. Maybe it was time I started to investigate a bit. I slowly made my way to her bedroom and opened the door. Everything seemed so still. The curtains had stopped moving from the lack of wind that was blowing earlier. I walked across the room and sat on her bed, beginning to wonder what could have happened. My Mother had a lot of health issues, having her first heart attack at 35 years old. Since then, she had undergone three open-heart surgeries. I was always amazed at how strong that woman

was, and how far modern medicine had come. I considered myself very lucky for still having her in my life despite all of these serious complications.

With her health issues in mind, I thought maybe I should try to contact the hospital. This had happened before, where my Mother disappeared, only for me to find out she was hospitalized. I pulled out my phone and dialed the number to the local hospital.

“Hello?” The receptionist greeted me.

“Hello, I am looking for my mother, Sam Carmichael. I am her daughter and she has been missing since I woke up this morning. I was just wondering if she ended up in the hospital again.”

“Sam Carmichael?” She repeated back to me. “Let me see, that doesn’t sound familiar, but I will check the system for you. Please hold.”

The line clicked and smooth jazz started to play from my phone. I sat and waited for a good two minutes before she came back to the call.

“Yeah.. I am not seeing her in my system. Are you sure she would have come to this hospital?” She asked.

“Yes, this is the hospital she has always gone to. I appreciate you looking for me. Thank you.” I replied.

“Not a problem, ma’am. I hope you can find her.” She said back before we exchanged goodbyes and hung up.

“Welp..” I thought to myself. She’s not in the hospital.. where the hell could this woman have gone? She only has one long distance friend. She was never very social throughout her life, which I picked up after her. I wondered if she had ditched town to see her friend, but quickly thought that she would have definitely told me she was leaving. I decided to call her friend just to see if she had gone there. I flipped through my contacts until I found her name and proceeded to give her a ring.

“Rosemary?” She answered. “Weird of you to call, is everything okay?”

My heart sank a little. Weird of me to call? My mom is most definitely not with her.

“Yeah, it’s me. Have you heard anything from my mom, Melissa? I woke up this morning and she was gone. I called the hospital and she wasn’t there. I’m starting to get a little worried about her, this isn’t normal for her.”

“No, I haven’t spoken to her since last week. Have you tried calling her?”

I smacked my forehead. Why didn’t I think of that in the first place? Of course I should have tried to call her. I felt like an idiot.

“Actually.. I have not. Thanks for that suggestion. I don’t know why I haven’t thought of that. Thank you, Melissa. I will text you if she answers or anything comes up.”

"Sounds good, kid." Melissa replied. "Take care, love ya."

"Love you too, Melissa."

The phone clicked as the call ended. Feeling silly, I dialed my mother's number and waited patiently for my phone to connect. There was no ring from the other end. After a few seconds, the phone rang that nasty tone in my ear that meant the phone was out of service. I immediately felt sick. My stomach turned into knots as I wondered what the fuck was going on.

I quickly got up and hastily made my way toward's her bedroom window. With the lack of a screen, and popped my head out to look around. There were footprints in the snow below me. I was alarmed as I realized, the prints were from barefoot feet. Nothing about this was adding up. Why would my mother crawl out of her bedroom window and walk completely barefoot in the snow? By this time, I truly felt like I was going to be sick.

"What is going on?" I thought. "What happened to my mom?"

I decided to follow the foot prints in the snow. I bundled up in my green coat, put on my snow boots and headed out of the front door. The bells hung on the door had made their usual ringing sound as I opened it. Mom put them there when I was a teenager to try to keep me from sneaking out with my friends. I learned how to open the door without making a single sound because of that. I weakly smiled at that memory and started my journey to follow my mother's footsteps.

The walk was very short. I entered the woods behind my house and looked up into the sky. I always loved the way the snow would fall on the naked tree branches in the Winter. It was one of my favorite things about this awful season.

Her footprints ended abruptly at a tree with a very thick circumference. Come to think of it, I had never actually seen this tree before. I walked through these woods quite frequently during the warm months. Maybe it was just something I overlooked, I had thought to myself. Sometimes I did tend to get jaded to the beauties of nature. I walked around the tree to see if the footprints continued. Nothing, they had come to a dead halt at the foot of the tree. I could feel myself getting shaky, and not just from the cold. A panic attack was coming on. I quickly ran home to take some of my anxiety medication, swallowing down two of them. The day quickly turned into night as I paced back and forth through the house, practicing my deep breathing and pondering what could have happened to my Mother. It was time to give up for the night. I took the rest of my night time medications and tried my hardest to drift off to sleep on the couch.

I awoke the next morning with a knot in my stomach from the day before. It never truly went away. I lazily got myself off of the couch and repeated the self care routine I had done the morning before. Afterwards, instead of sitting down to work on my jewelry, I immediately bundled up and went out the door to that mysterious tree I had overlooked my entire time living there.

My mother's footprints were covered by fresh fallen snow. It crunched loudly beneath my feet as I walked. It was packing snow, which was great for building snowmen, something I recalled from

being a kid. I had pleasant flashbacks to my childhood, playing in the snow with my father and making snow mountains that I climbed and slid down. I thought about how much I missed that man, something I had thought about quite frequently. My mom was married to him for over 40 years before he had passed away due to health complications. He was my rock for my entire life. When he left, a part of me died, and I never got that part of myself back. I started to tear up. My dad was gone, and now possibly my mom? The tears quickly started to fall from my eyes, down my face and into the snow, leaving little holes where they landed.

“Mom, where are you?!” I shouted into the empty forest, followed by a crying scream. At that point, I was a bawling mess. I felt another panic attack coming on. I ran back home, tripping over myself twice. The second time I had landed face first into the freezing snow. I lied there for a few seconds, feeling completely defeated. I started to wonder about all the bad things that could have happened to her. Was she okay? Was she even still alive? I picked myself up from out of the snow and frantically finished the walk back to my house. Another benzodiazepine went down the hatch. I only had a few more left. I had to start being sparing with them as I wouldn’t see my doctor for two more weeks, but God was I such a mess.

The days turned into weeks, and the weeks into months. Before I knew it, those two days happened about 6 years ago. I never found out what happened to my mother that day, and almost every day I sit and wonder what she went through. It was almost supernatural what had happened. I will never understand why she walked barefoot through the snow and disappeared at the trunk of a tree. Even the search teams & police officers were baffled by the mystery of her disappearance.

I ended up selling my childhood home, as I couldn't bear to keep living in it without either of my parents. My business took off shortly after my mother's disappearance. I started selling multiple pieces of jewelry a week, which racked up money quickly. After about a year, I was making a very good living for myself off of my jewelry alone. I like to think my Mother watches over me and guides me through my creativeness, and maybe even had something to do with my business becoming so successful after she disappeared.

For the most part, I am happy now. It only took 38 years for me to amount to something. But hey, better late than never, right? Mom would be so proud of me now.