

Dear Dad,

There's a picture of us that I love. I'm three, maybe four years old, sitting on your lap in a Snow White costume. You've got on that blue striped shirt on and a flimsy, gold, fabric crown sits on top of your head. I love how I'm practically falling off of you and the lopsided position of the crown, but most of all, I love how inexplicably happy I look to be there. I don't remember that day, or whatever game we must've been playing, but that picture makes me so sick with happiness I feel like crying.

I think I was six when I started to notice the fighting between you and mom. We were getting in the car to go out. Shopping, or something. I was buckled into my car seat when you just started screaming. She had done something wrong, or you had blamed her too fast. I wasn't trying to listen, but I heard someone say "divorce", and all of a sudden my six-year-old heart was beating faster. My chest was feeling tighter. I barely knew what it meant, but I was scared. Mom said that she would take both me and my brother, and I watched as your mouth slid into a frown, the anger in your eyes dulling into pain. I got out of my seat so fast you would've thought that someone was dangling a new Barbie in front of me. You turned to go back inside the house, and I jumped into your arms. "I'll go with Daddy," I said, clutching onto you as if you'd already divided up your assets and moved out of the house. "I'll go with Daddy."

You don't cry a lot. The first time I saw you cry was when Grandpa died. Gūgū had just called. You hung up the phone and just started to sob. I had never heard those sounds come out of you. You didn't cry. I remember the funeral, and the way you and Gūgū threw yourselves onto his casket, wailing for your Bà. And afterward, the fire. The money. You, talking about all the

places he'd wanted to see, and how he never got the chance to. The way your voice was raw with emotion. With grief. Where do you want to go, dad? I'll take you.

We've gone on a lot of walks in the past couple of years. It started when we got our dog. Walking here, walking there, stopping to pick up poop, pausing to look at the sunset, we've done it all. One grey morning in September, we headed out. I was spiraling. I was the size of a fifth grader. There was a voice telling me things, pounding on the doors of my brain, trying to weasel their way through the cracks. You tried to explain that eating less than 1000 calories a day was going to end with me in the ground, but all I could hear was "1000 calories." I told you that you couldn't scare me into getting better. All you were doing was telling me the truth.

I once read a quote about flaws. Something to do with diamonds and pebbles. It reminded me of you. You don't like to apologize or admit you're wrong. You shoot off at the mouth, sometimes, and you don't realize it. I don't point out your flaws to hurt you. You're not perfect, Bàba. You have flaws. But having flaws is not a flaw. There are pillars to love. The strongest one, the one crafted by the brightest engineers, the one designed by the most creative, is accepting a person's flaws as a part of them. Your flaws might lead to a fight, or two, or three, maybe more, but I won't ask you to change. I only ask that you understand.

Do you remember the overly dramatic letter I wrote you a few years ago? The one where I tried to explain myself to you because you didn't "know me?" I wrote that because you'd promised to watch a movie with me, but you came down to the basement just a few minutes too late. I don't know what could've made me so upset. You're my dad. You go to work for longer

hours, so you see me less than Mom does, but you know me. You know me. You'll always know me, even if you don't book the doctor's appointments, or know all my teachers' names. Mom will say you're not supportive, or you don't want to be involved, but I know you care. I know you support us, and I know you want to be involved. It doesn't matter how many questions you have to ask, or how many times you need us to repeat something. You're my dad. And you don't need to know what my fourth period class is to prove that.

I once told you that my biggest fear was losing my relationship with my family. It's still true. I can't wake up one day and not know that my parents and their unconditional love aren't just a phone call away. We fight all the time. Probably every day. Maybe it's because you won't stop with the criticisms, or maybe I just won't listen when you ask me to, but it doesn't matter. Not really. It matters enough to make you mad in the moment, or make me say something I don't really mean, but after that, you're still my dad, and I'm still your daughter. And there are a lot of dads out there. A lot of really *good* dads. But there aren't that many like you.

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