

Someone's Daddy

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It's funny how dark a room can become, no matter how much the sunlight, streaming through the window, tries to make it otherwise. And the walls, papered with a colorful pattern, seem to have become coated with the grey of the moment. We are all here, sitting around the kitchen table, to remember one who has just been lost. John was my wife's father. No, he was my wife's daddy. Although no blood linked them, their closeness is something I could only wish to have with my father. John's visits were always a cause for excitement, well in advance. In a few years there was a promise of those visits becoming more frequent.

Somber faces stare down at the table; a hand continually empties the Kleenex box. The priest hastily jots notes for the next day's funeral service. The whole town will be there. This isn't a big town, so everyone knows everyone else. They even know my wife and me, although we've only visited this town twice before. We are asked, by the priest, to remember things we loved about John. At first, memories fade to the sense of loss. The fog finally lifts enough for the memories of all his wives. He had many. It strikes everyone as funny, how well his ex-wives get along. With many wives come many children, his and other men's. But they're all his kids; not one feels otherwise.

I find I must remove myself from the kitchen; I'd rather cry alone. I retreat to the back porch, my favorite part of this house. Through the rain I can still see the endless green lawns connecting the back doors of the few houses nearby. No fences mar these backyards. His garden is in full bloom, although in just the last week the weeds have begun moving in unchecked. I feel cavernous, quite lost in the darkness.

He used to play the trumpet, a long time ago. Very well, we are told by his brother. My wife cannot look at his brother; he looks too much like her dad.

John was a fine electronics man. He was well liked by everyone that used to work for him in the electronics firm, including the many

secretaries that demanded he greet them everyday. When he left and hit the road they were very upset.

He got away from the city, from the stress and strain. He drove a moving truck until one day a heart attack brought him to this town. He stayed. He was able to enjoy many years here and was almost ready to retire.

When my wife was told by her mother that they were getting a divorce, the first words out of her mouth were, "What did you do to him?"

"How are you doing?" The voice behind me is that of his oldest daughter, just emerging through the screen door. I tell her I'm surviving. She has many of his features. He was supposed to come out and spend time fishing with her, after he retired. He really loved fishing; that is one thing everyone has agreed upon.

I never knew my father. I've had a few substitutes, but they've come and gone. My wife's dad is the closest I ever had. I've known him longer than any of the others.

My wife loves to tell how her dad drove many miles through a snow storm just to pick her up. When I first met him he had driven all of the way out to California just to visit. I was the only boyfriend of my wife's he ever met.

I decide to return to the kitchen. A new box of Kleenex has been started. I quietly return to my wife. The day has been hard on her. A box of his things is being passed around, mementos for the family. I know what my wife wants. He used to have a worry stone. That one was lost, but she receives its replacement. His oldest daughter finds his bolo tie, the same one he wears in our wedding picture. His watch is given to another. Many things are left; we have his memory.

The priest leaves to prepare for tomorrow. Subdued small talk. It is decided that we will meet later; for now we must go pay our respects. We go down to his favorite haunt and have a beer.