

Miracle

By: William Wright

I am shaken awake by a brother who is trembling. He is on edge and pale, yet his hands are soft, a gentle shake awakening me to a world that has completely changed. A fact that I'm unaware of.

"Something's happened. Poppa is in the hospital." My brother told me. He was dressed in a mishmash of clothes, clearly he had scrambled to get dressed.

"Ok." I said. My mother had recently spent a little time in the hospital, so I thought that it would be like that.

"Get dressed. We're going up there."

I eyed the floor. My brother had a prized pair of button up Adidas track pants that in his haste he hadn't put on, instead opted for a ratty pair of sweats. Knowing that this was an important time, he wasn't going to hassle me if I slipped on his pants like I had always wanted to. He was much older than me, 9 years, but due to my size, we could fit in the same clothing. I grabbed a book, one that I had checked out from my fifth grade library, "Miracle on 34th Street." I had heard of the movie, but had never watched it. I was 11 and black and white movies did not speak to me. In a fleeting feeling of festivity, I had checked it out earlier today; the last day before Christmas break.

Tonight had been the first night of Christmas break. It had been innocuous, a trip to a sandwich restaurant and some light shopping. My mother, father, and I were gearing up for a, hopefully annual, trip to Colorado to visit my best friend. He had moved the previous year.

I gathered my things and followed my brother out of my room. I passed the door to my parent's bedroom it was open like they always left it. Everything seemed normal enough. Then rounding the corner, I noticed the furniture in the hallway was moved, hastily adjusted and left to the side, completely out of place.

The cold air of the middle of the night bit as I walked outside. My older sister was waiting in a running car. I got into the back seat with my brother. "I'm so sorry" my sister said.

"It'll be ok." I told her.

I took in the Christmas lights that adorned the houses and businesses we passed on the way to the hospital. My sister repeated a couple of times that she was "so, so sorry" and was clearly stifling more. My brother next to me felt colder than the outside air. He had done the duty, waking me up, and now spaced out, staring at nothing out the window. I felt like grabbing his hand that rested listlessly on the seat.

I still felt ok. We had just done this with my mom. I would be in the waiting room reading my book. I liked reading *and* I had the cool pants on. It was going to be ok.

We arrive at the hospital and enter through the emergency doors. The three of us immediately headed for the waiting area, passing a double door that led to the emergency rooms. Through the window I spied my mother walking and talking with a doctor. They were coming my way and she was smiling.

Everything was going to be ok. Instead of sitting, I waited by the doors for her to walk out. She saw me, her eyes filled with tears, "I'm so sorry." She told me.

I didn't say anything.

My mother hugged me. "Your poppa passed away."

No.

"No, I brought this book to read in the waiting room. I'm to sit and read like I did when *you* were in the hospital and he'll be ok."

My mother pulled me tighter and began to cry. The doctor stood by her. I spied my brother and sister, my transports, in the waiting room. They were pale. Shell-shocked. They had known all along. Now, another brother has entered the emergency room. He, clearly, has come in from a night partying. He is crying. Everyone is crying. I'm still holding my book.

The doctor whom my mother was walking with asks if we'd like to see the body. I don't answer. We are whisked away to a dim operating room. Poppa is in the middle of the room, equipment all pushed aside, like a prize. "He may look a little different than normal" my mother choked out, "they did everything they could."

I floated into the room, unsure of how my legs were operating. I was still holding my book. My cool Adidas button ups swished as I approached the vessel that had once been home to my father's soul. He looked the same, more or less. Slight purpling on his skin. The oddest thing was his lack of glasses. He always had glasses on.

I was there for maybe a minute before I was rushed into another room. It was a small office with chairs along the wall. I had a seat and stared at the cover of my book, tracing the word miracle in my mind. Miracle. Miracle.

All of my family that was at the hospital piled into the room. No one said anything, we were stoic. There were the quiet tears of a new life being realized with every breath. Now the door opens and a man in casual dress sits down. "I'm Father Ben and I'd like to offer my condolences." There is a pause while he makes eye contact with each of us. "Would anyone like to say anything?"

No one speaks, so I speak as if possessed: "Who am I going to watch the Cowboy's game with on Sunday?" I cannot remember actually sitting down and watching a full professional football game with my father, but this little bug of an event, a throwaway December matchup with the Eagles, overtook my brain. I shot up from my chair. "WHO? WHO AM I GOING TO WATCH IT WITH?" I was practically screaming. Everyone just looked at me. My mother began to cry again. I wanted to kick a wall. Did I kick a wall?

My mind is blank. We're suddenly pulling back into our driveway. How did I get out of the hospital? Our home looks different, the energy all changed. The Christmas lights no longer cheerful, instead a somber eternal glow. My father had put those lights up. Who would take them down? I unbuckle my seatbelt and see my book next to me. I pick it up and exit the car. I meet my mother on the front walkway. "It'll be ok" I tell her, "I've already accepted it." I shrug. She begins to wail just short of the finish line that is our front door. "No, baby, it won't be."

I stumble inside and lay down on the couch. A lovely big, green, faux leather couch that swallows the bodies of all those that sit on it. A green monster. I close my eyes.

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People are starting to filter into our home. My mother crying again as each person stops to pay their condolences. I wonder if everything is too soon. You can't miss someone when they haven't been gone the length of a work shift. Maybe you can't miss someone until they've been gone for what would be considered a longer vacation. Two weeks. That's when you can miss a *person*. What these people are all sorry for is that our life has changed and it changed in an instant and they are sorry because it happened but deep down they are happy because it didn't happen to them. "Hug your husbands." I remember my mother telling her friends as they arrived and as they left.

Someone left a dozen donuts on the table next to the couch. They put the box on top of my book. I ate six and laid back down. When I woke back up the donuts were gone and so was the book.

More family had arrived. No one wanted to disturb me. I had been disturbed enough, I guess. "Where is my book?" I asked. No one knew. It had been moved to a place unknown. I was frantic. I needed to find it.

I tore through the house, rudely ignoring the continuous stream of well-wishers. I found the book on my bedside table. It was the first time I had been back in my room since I had been awoken by my brother. It felt different. I picked the book up and looked at the cover again reading each word of the title: The Miracle. On. 34th Street.

I set the book back down and left my room. I made a quick about face and reentered my room, grabbed the book, and shoved it in my school backpack. I wanted to make sure it got back to where it belonged when this was all over. I never read it.