

Title: Tuesday.

Past:

It was just a Tuesday.

Our aircon was broken and the windows were open letting summer's lingering heat into the house.

My Dad wasn't home from work yet – but I was distracted by the show playing on the TV, by the ice lolly my Mum had let me have before dinner. Dripping, sticky onto my little fingers, staining my tongue orange.

My Mum was in the kitchen. The landline phone wedged between her head and her shoulder. The cord was pulling on her like a chain – she couldn't move too far. There was the rhythmic sound of a knife against the cutting board of muffled conversations.

My Mum was upset.

Her and Dad had been fighting a lot that summer. It was shouting late at night that floated under my bedroom door. It was the look my Mum would give him, the way she would purse her lips, like she was holding back what she really wanted to say.

I glanced out the window, at the sun bleeding from the sky leaving behind a trail of oranges and reds.

"Whatever Mark," My Mum said — louder than she'd been speaking before, then the phone slammed back into place.

My gaze flicked over to her. She pinched the bridge of her nose and then looked across at me and gave me a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes.

"Everything ok?"

"Of course," she turned away, stirring the pot simmering on the stove. "Set the table. Dinner will be ready soon."

We ate in silence. Something was on my Mum mind and the silence was more oppressive than the summer heat.

My Mum sent me to bed. She didn't even ask me to help her wash up.

I lay in bed. Tangled in the sheets that swallowed my small limbs. The ceiling fan spun.

Headlights flooded in through my window. I heard the sounds of brakes screech against gravel. Of keys twisting into the lock – I ran downstairs.

The door was flung open.

My Dad stood in the darkness of the porch.
I smiled when I saw him.

He was wearing his leather jacket, hair mussed like he'd run his hand through it a thousand times. Tiredness woven into his face, stitched under his eyes. His blue eyes were red, blotchy.

"Hey Dad," I called out.

He didn't smile, didn't react. But he pulled me in for a hug. Arms that wrapped around me, soft, gentle.

I looked down at the floor and that's when I saw it... he wasn't wearing shoes.

I didn't comment, didn't pull away.

It was just a Tuesday.

The next morning there was a knock on our door.

I opened the door and men in police uniforms expressions softened when they saw me.

"Hey there, sweetheart," he crouched down, we were eye to eye. "Is your dad Mark Miller?"

I nodded, holding on tighter to the teddy bear between my arms.

"Is he home?" The other man said.

"Who's at the door?" My mum interrupted, rounding the corner. She stopped when she saw them.

Scared – she looked scared.

"Can I help you?" she asked, folding her arms over her chest.

"We're here for Mark Miller."

They narrowed their eyes on her.

She stiffened, voice flat when she said "Go get your Dad."

The hallway felt longer than it did normally. Walking along the wood I wasn't sure if I wanted to reach the end. My Dad was passed out, limbs stretched along the couch.

He was still wearing his leather jacket.

I poked him with one finger, gentle – too gentle to make him stir.

I pushed him, with the palm of my hand.

He groaned.

My voice didn't sound like my own when the words fell out. "The police are looking for you."

They dragged him away, handcuffs, pulling him along the gravel driveway.

My Mum watched from the doorway, hands clutching to the side. Tears streamed down her face. They streamed down mine too.

Present:

I lay on the floor, hands running along the carpet, it was soft, gentle between my fingers. Some years ago my Dad told me he wanted to change it to wood – he never got around to it. I'm glad he didn't, it feels better this way. Carpet in a house full of wood. Something warm, something that's mine.

I hear the phone ringing down stairs.

I think about ignoring it.

Think about how easy it would be to let it ring out.

But like a marionette on a string I get up and stomp down the stairs.

I pick up the phone. "Hello," I say lazily, coiling the cord around my fingers.

"Hey, buttercup."

I freeze.

"Hey Dad."

Past:

Everyone knew about it before I did.
It was whispered in the school hallway. At recess, during class.

Newspaper articles on the front page.

My Mum was at work, always moving, never slowing down. Like she knew if she stopped it would all catch up to her.

I was home alone. The newspaper was on the kitchen bench.

I clambered onto the stool and gripped the paper in my hands.

"Local Dad Kills Two in Tragic Hit and Run."

I blinked, the words didn't become cleared.

There was a photo of him, black and white, taken from last year's school carnival. He was smiling. You could see the ferris wheel in the background, a hint of pink fairyfloss around his mouth.

It had been a good day.

I didn't read the rest.

Couldn't swallow down the dryness clawing at my throat.

Couldn't ignore what I'd heard people say.

He's an alcoholic.

He killed people.

It wasn't true. His trial hadn't happened yet. It wasn't true.

Present:

"I know you're not expecting a call from me."

I held my breath, afraid that it would sound too much like a sob. It had been eight years since I'd seen his face. Since I'd heard his voice.

“Why are you calling me?” I breathed out into the phone line, voice shaky.

Sometimes I would think about it.

About what the crash must have been like.

About the warm blood spilling onto the road.

What it was like when he got out of the car, when their blood soaked into his shoes.

What he felt when he was driving away.

About the boy – only a few years older than me.

We used to see him in the park sometimes.

His Mum had golden-blond hair. Now she was lifeless.

I saw her a few times in the grocery store.

Baby on her hip, she smiled when she caught me staring. I didn't smile back, just buried my face into the fabric of my Dads jeans.

She smiled at me in the grocery store.

Then he killed her.

I wonder if he ever thought about me, if he looked at that boy crumpled on the road and saw my eyes.

I sucked in a sharp breath.

There was a pause, before my Dad said. “Did your Mum tell you?”

“Tell me what?”

His voice was soft, like a confession. “I got out of jail.”

I got out of jail

The words echoed through me, before they consumed me.

Like a stain, a memory, something I wanted to forget.

He spoke again, “and I know you probably don't want to hear from me and I know I screwed everything up –” his voice hitched, melting like candle wax. I heard him crying, I tightened my lips. “-- but I want you to see me, I want you to know I've changed. I've sent you plane tickets, think about it ok.”

I close my eyes and for a moment I'm still six years old. On the highest place in the world – my Dad's shoulders. He's laughing as we walk over to the park, nothing is wrong and nothing is broken.

I'm not six years old anymore.

There's a beat, something heavy with everything I'm never going to say. "Ok," I mumble.

"Dad called me." I say at the dinner table.

My Mum pauses, a fork twirled with pasta lifted halfway. "He wrote you a letter." Her voice is cool, detached. Like we could be talking about the weather.

"Were you ever going to tell me?"

She stays silent. Like always.

"Can I read it?"

She hesitates for a moment and then stands up from the table and I wonder if this will become just another thing with my Dad that she pushes under the rug.

I hear her footsteps along the wood, she places an opened envelope down onto the table and then walks away again.

I stare at it, white and ordinary.

My hands shake as I open it. As I opened the letter, a ticket fell out.

I stare at it for a moment.

Thinking about my Dad.

About my Mum.

About the life we almost had.

It's just a letter, just a plane ticket.

I'm just now sure if it's a step forward or a step back.

Just another Tuesday.

By Juliet Gwizdek - Faulkner.

