

Thanks, Mom

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Winslow had never seen a tornado. He had seen videos on the computer monitors at school, but he had never seen one for himself. This would be the day that changed that, or at least according to the man on the Eight A.M. News. Today was gonna be the first February tornado in Loving County, Texas in a decade. It wasn't expected to damage any communities, but, just to be safe, school had been cancelled and families were instructed to stay tucked within the deepest confines of their homes. Winslow opted to disregard this warning. He looked out the window as he sat on a cracked wooden chair. There was a creak from the couch, and Winslow's father sat up for the first time all morning.

"Why are you not in school, boy," he asked with his eyes closed as he choked back a combination of mucus, whiskey, and vomit from the night before.

"No school today. Twister supposed to come our way within the hour," Winslow answered nervously.

"You mean to tell me I gotta put up with your fuckin' noise all day?" and with this, Winslow's father took a swig from his bottle of Rebecca Creek, and collapsed back into the couch.

There was a certain game that Winslow liked to play when his father spoke to him like this. He would ask himself what he was doing on this day last year, and spend a few minutes imagining he was back there. He used to write down whatever he could recall, until his father had caught him and given him the belt ten times. Winslow shut his eyes and pressed his forehead against the window glass in an effort to remember. This had been the week of mom's dance re-

cital. She had taken a part time waitressing job and saved her earnings for six months to start taking lessons. She'd been dancing in the living room every other hour for four weeks in preparation for the show. Winslow and his father would sit next to each other on the couch and watch her spin and twirl around the coffee table; a blur of beauty that they didn't dare stop staring at. Winslow would clap in rhythm as his father sat back and drank a glass of whiskey with a slight smile on his face. She always narrowly avoided crashing into the furniture which would make Winslow anxious. Therefore, it wasn't particularly shocking when, on this day last year, she had stumbled into a wooden chair. The chair had come down with a thundering crash, and when the dust settled it was missing most of its backrest. Winslow's mother rose from the ground and was visibly trying to fight the urge to giggle. She carefully avoided meeting the eyes of her husband as Winslow's father looked at the chair and then back at his wife. He stood up and stomped toward her. Winslow's mother stood her ground as she always had, and didn't make a sound as his whiskey-soaked hand came hard across her jaw. Winslow watched helplessly and his father stormed out of the house. As Winslow felt his eyes begin to water, his mother took a seat next to him and held him tightly.

"Don't worry my beautiful boy, I promise you, someday we'll run away together. We'll just pack up and go in the night, and we'll be rid of this house forever," she had said softly.

Winslow opened his eyes when a horrible discovery spontaneously arose within him. This would be the last week he could play this game. At least, it would be the last time he wanted to play. Thoughts that Winslow was always running from caught up with him. He pushed them from his mind, though he knew they would be back soon. Winslow looked out across the landscape and spotted what looked like a large grey animal walking slowly on the horizon. He squinted his eyes and then opened them wide. This was the tornado. Winslow watched as it

moved without direction, swallowing the dirt beneath and spitting it back out. It displaced anything it touched. Winslow wondered if the story his mother told him years ago about a girl who got caught in a twister, and ended up in a fantasy land, could be true. How wonderful it would be to take a roll of the dice; be somebody else, somewhere else. Anybody else, anywhere else.

The intrusive thoughts burst through the floodgates that Winslow had put in place to protect himself. That morning, the note, and everyday since was cast into the spotlight and Winslow was powerless to resist.

The note. One line, five words, on a piece of torn out newspaper advertisement, and hidden in his folded pair of socks. This was all that she had left him. Winslow remembered waking up the morning of his mother's dance recital, and walking downstairs to find the small kitchen empty. He checked to see if his mother was still asleep, and when he did, he saw clothes scattered all over the floor. Winslow instantly had an idea of what was going on, and went downstairs to check the front closet. He braced himself before turning the knob, and opened the door to discover his greatest fear had become a reality. The suitcase that his father used to take when he went away for weeks at a time was missing. Betrayal, pain, despair, loneliness, lies. She had promised to take him with her. How could she-*no no no!*

Winslow opened his eyes once more, and looked out the window. Chaos had erupted, and people were fleeing their homes in trucks, bicycles, tractors, anything they had that could hold at least a few of their belongings and help them seek safety. The tornado no longer roamed passively on the outstretches of civilization. The man on the Eight A.M. News had been wrong. Winslow stared in awe. The centripetal motion was so fluid and powerful, it commanded one's attention. It hypnotized him-a fourteen year old boy unable to pull his gaze away from nature's deadliest dancer.

Winslow snapped back into the living world. Noise. Screaming, tearing, ripping noises exploded through the window, and for a moment, Winslow was stunned once more. He had very few possessions worth saving, but there was one thing Winslow couldn't leave without. He ran upstairs and grabbed the note from the bottom of his nightstand, and went back to the front door. With one hand on the knob, Winslow remembered that his father was passed out on the couch-blissfully ignorant of the disaster unfolding just outside his yard.

"You didn't treat me right. You didn't treat either of us right. You're the reason she left. You're the reason I'm alone. I'm sorry poppa, but I think this world is better off without you," Winslow muttered through tears.

He turned the doorknob and sprinted as fast as he could. He wasn't running from the tornado though. He was running from an abusive father, an unsafe home, and a lifetime of walking on eggshells. This would be the start of a new existence for Winslow, in which he wasn't regarded as a burden or beaten with a belt. Finally, he was afforded the opportunity to just be a kid.

When he had gotten three hundred yards away, Winslow turned around. The twister danced a mere fifty yards from his old house. Winslow stared and suddenly had a strange impulse to clap in rhythm. As his childhood home was pulled entirely out of the dirt, Winslow reached into his pocket to read the note, as he had a thousand times before.

"I'll come back for you."

Winslow smiled. "Thanks, mom."

