

Hunger

by Gary Moshimer

It took all four of his kids to convince my father to pull the plug. Mom's car crash had left her a vegetable, but of course he hung on. Once they withdrew life support, she was gone in ten minutes. The first thing our father said was that he was hungry. He felt guilty. In the hospital cafe he ordered eggs and bacon, pancakes and sausage, OJ and milk and coffee. He hadn't eaten for days.

When the young waitress laughed he said, "This is not funny, girl. My wife of forty years is gone. GONE! And why? To make room for the replacements. That would be you. You shouldn't laugh. You will need to take your responsibility seriously."

She padded off quickly.

"Dad."

"What. She knows what's coming."

"She's just a kid."

"She has to grow up fast. We need her."

"It's not like we're fighting a war."

"Oh, it's a war alright. War against death."

"It's a lot of pressure."

"She can handle it."

The girl came back — her tag said, ELISE — and laid out my father's feast. Her hand's were shaking.

He nodded to her seriously. She stood nearby and quickly refilled his coffee and milk and juice. She brought more napkins.

Our father said, "See that."

He ate ravenously. She must have said something, because the house just kept supplying more eggs and whatever he needed to be satiated. He paid the whole bill and gave Elise a twenty dollar tip, way more than necessary.

Then we saw her in the parking lot. Instead of acknowledging my father she just jumped into her Camaro and peeled off. She was not careful, as though she were worried about carrying on the world. She was a girl going to get laid and risk a jump from a waterfall.

Our father watched the Camaro pass on a double line. "Damn kids," he said.

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