

## ***The Phone Call*** (Inspired by 'Tomorrow is Too Far' by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie')

Thirteen years is long enough to forget, long enough to choose what to remember. Even now, your father's house becomes desolate in your mind - empty and alone; and you know the bricks and water still live and breathe but you know nothing of this man of whom you share blood and a nose (or so you're told, you can't remember), and you don't care. You don't care because he chose to not know his daughter. In your mind, his hands holding yours become cold and lifeless, morphing into the elegant fingers of a woman: your mother, who cared enough to not let you know him.

It was a Sunday morning. The melancholy clouds warned a hostile rainfall, heavy and leaden in the sky like a burden to the gods. You, however, did not care; excitement infested every corner of your mind, creeping in like sunshine through a stained glass window. Your bags dragged the tips of your tiny fingers, imprinting red lines and making them go all purple; but still, you did not care - the bags were packed and ready, he could not say '*you weren't prepared*' or '*he couldn't wait for you to pack your bags because he would get charged for parking*' (which sounded like very plausible excuses to not see his 8 year old to you).

*9 o'clock, 10 o'clock...*

You waited eagerly like a lost puppy at the door.

*11 o'clock, 12 o'clock...*

Mum had woken up. "You're up early," she yawned

"I'm waiting." You murmured, to which a peculiar look enveloped her face, a look an 8 year old could not yet fathom; her tender eyes downturned and pitying she gave a soft smile, but behind her eyes just out of grasp was a deep, disquieting look of loathing. For you? No. for him?

Anytime now he would pull into the drive; he would never forget about you? Your ears pined for the obstreperous tune of his sports car and the obnoxious blaring of the radio; every chatter and spit of every passing car filled your heart with a racing anticipation which sunk deep and deflated when the vehicle passed.

***The phone rang.***

Your mother hurried to pick it up, her voice hushed but coarse.

"Hello?"

*"Yeah, I just thought I'd let you know I can't pick her up today, you know work and all,"* and the sound of a bustling restaurant escaped through the telephone wire... but offices and restaurants sounded similar, right?

"Bit last minute don't you reckon? I can't keep coming up with excuses." Your mother whispered, her eyes like bullets and her hand cradling the phone close to her ear while the other shielded it with a tight grip so you couldn't hear.

*"She's a smart kid she'll get it, I'll see her next week."*

He did not see you next week;

Or the week after that;

Or the week after that.

The week after that he argued with your mother, so you wouldn't see him for a while anyway; but this time was different. He never came back. You hated her, tears of envy burned behind your big eyes and welled like the sea when you thought of either of them; it was surely your mother's fault he didn't want to see his daughter, and you kept telling yourself that because it hurt too much to accept *your truth* that he really just didn't want to see you. You know better now.

Now you are grown up. Time has healed the inner child and showered it with fond memories. Your mother is proud. You are happy.

***The phone rings.***

You pick it up, you delicately place the phone in your hand and bring it to your ear, "Hello?"

*"Hello this is the hospital, your father is extremely unwell and in critical condition. He has made a request to see his daughter one last time, please come to ward 2 immediately."*

"I'm so sorry," you sigh, a sincere tone masking a twisted grin; you weren't particularly happy, no, but the overwhelming feeling of relief superseded any feelings of grief or guilt. After all, *your father* never felt guilt.

"I'm at work right now, I'll see him next weekend," you reply.

Thirteen years is too long.