

The Astronaut and The Balloon

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The gradient hues of orange and blue blanketed the sky as you looked up, the beauty of the moment tinged with sorrow. In your trembling hands, you clutched something so dear that it had become a fragile piece of your heart. Nostalgia washed over you like a relentless tide, dimming your senses and drowning your rationality, allowing memories to resurface.

With each step you took, the evening wind, carrying the sweet scent of Chrysanthemums, overwhelmed your senses. Your heart grew heavy, weighed down by the echoes of voices you once cherished, now playing in your mind like a broken record. In a daze, as you gazed upon the gentle evening sun, you closed your eyes to relive those memories one last time.

"I want to reach the moon!" an unassuming yet prideful elation of a child was heard. The scent of the Chrysanthemum and dirt where sorrow follows was no more as the sharp fragrance of a sterile room washed over. You gazed upwards to see a boy glued to his bed as the machinery beside him shrieked ominous periodical beeps. Glimmered by the golden rays of the sun, he frolicked ever so happily with his toy rocket ship on his hospital bed as if the nuance never crossed his mind.

Sadness and joy are two sides of the same coin, you thought. An ounce of that joy could surmount even the tallest summit and to a child, a dependable father was all he needed to pass through the narrow hole of tomorrow. Draped in his favorite space-patterned pajamas, he waved at you with his energetic glee to welcome your timely arrival after a long day at work. Like the soothing waves of the midnight ocean, your worries were washed over as enthusiasm emerged. No father would've been unhappy to see his child smile, so you reached out to embrace him. However, what you hugged wasn't what you expected. It was a picture book.

Your mind puzzled over the sensation. You were sure that what you were hugging was your son. Yet, the soft edges that nudged your arms weren't anything resembling a child. And so you looked. In your hands, you found a colorful book decorated with illustrations of the legendary Apollo 11's moon landing. While gazing up, the orange sky blinded you for a moment as the veil on your vision was lifted. The rocket ship toy was set down on the bedside, and the child rested blissfully on his bed. His eyes were closed by his darkened eyelids; His attention was centered on listening to your words; and his breathing calmed to relive the tale in his imagination. He leaned his head towards you, sitting by his side. Shocked by the sight, you hurriedly looked upon the patient monitor. The electrocardiogram displayed a weakened pulse of your son, far from normal. Your hand was about to reach the doctor's line on the wall, but his sigh halted your movement.

"The Apollo 11's moon landing is so cool... I want to be just like them." A wishful tone of hope, yet his eyes remained closed. For him, such dreams must be experienced in the realm of imagination, far from his painful reality.

Irony, a single word appeared in your pessimistic mind. Yet the hopeful side of your logic concluded that the abnormality was caused by his tiredness. You sat back down, consoling him with your gentle pats on his silk-like hair glistened by the sun. You felt relieved as he was okay, but that would soon be broken by his attempt to sit on his bed. You told him to rest, yet he refused.

"Why?" You asked yourself in your heart. Confusion and anxiety crept over your consciousness as your worry never seemed to subside. The murky feeling of grimness overwhelmed your heart as his silhouette cast over you. With your trembling will, you mustered the strength to beg him. Alas, it was all in vain.

Sitting face to face was your son, bedridden in appalling health, gathering his all to face you, his father. His face was pale as death, his plumpy cheeks were sunken deep, and his breathing heaves. He slowly opened his eyes, revealing teary orbs, and a fragile, quivering smile graced his pale face. With the little hope he has left, he relayed to you his message assuredly.

"When I'm healthy... I'll build a big air balloon so that everyone can journey to space... And Dad..."

Your consciousness snapped from the weight of his words. Your steps were obstructed by a stone in the shape of a cross, adorned with a weathered bronze plaque. You knelt, tending to the overgrown weeds and blowing away the dust that obscured the inscription. The gentle scent of flowers evolved into a sharp pang of grief as you gently placed them beside the stone. Your grip on the helium balloon tightened until your knuckles whitened, reminded by sorrowful yet colorful memories drowned by years of tragedy.

"And Dad, you'll be my first passenger..." You uttered his words. The words of a hopeful son you cherished.

You fought back tears, but they flowed relentlessly. A man like you knew not to reveal your vulnerability to your son, but now, it was impossible. It felt as though a piece of your heart had been torn away, leaving an agonizing void. You cried, your sobs echoing through the stillness, flashing images of your son filling your vision. In that painful moment, you realized the ridiculousness of it all, yet you pressed on, compelled by a promise unfulfilled.

"Please watch over Daddy... I'll build a colossal balloon, one that will carry everyone to the stars."

"Onwards, to the skies beyond human grasp."