

Parting

From Brother Jesse's Tale,

Monk In The Cellar

My father left us when I was a very young man. He didn't mean to. He just forgot to take care of himself. He might have minded his health and blood pressure if he had realized he would die, that he would leave us somewhat destitute and forever heartbroken.

Had I been a young child when Dad passed away that afternoon, I would have cried and cried and then somehow gotten beyond the loss, as much as anyone ever can. But I was a young man, home on vacation from college, ready to finally have man to man conversations with him. After all those years of being a somewhat pissy teenager, I was just beginning to really talk to him. I wanted to learn from him. Not so much from his advice, which he was always very careful not to press upon me, but from the interplay of our ideas and experiences as almost equals. I began to see in what ways I was his son and I wanted to learn more from him about his life, his joys and failures. I hoped that doing so would help me avoid a few stumbles along my own path. And he was a nice guy; I just liked talking to him.

But he died. He died in my arms, my mother up front behind the wheel of the old Ford, foot pressing the accelerator to

the floor, running every stop light between our house and the Emergency Room. Dad trying to catch his breath in the back seat and me just holding him, not knowing what to do, until he was finally still. Two blocks before the hospital my mother sideswiped a car coming toward us. She didn't stop. The other car took our back bumper off and we just kept going. When we got to the ER door, an ambulance blocked it. Mom pulled the car up on the grass as close as she could get to the automatic door and threw the shift lever up into Park. Then she jumped out her door.

"Carry him in," she shouted at me as she ran in the doorway to get a nurse.

I did as I was told, and only later wondered how I had the strength to carry such a large man.

They took him from me. I started to follow, but an orderly, a large black man, stopped me. When I tried to brush past him, he did the strangest thing. He put his arms around me in a bear hug and he didn't let go until I stopped struggling. Then he pulled me over to a chair and pushed me into it. He sat beside me on the end table saying nothing.

"I'm OK," I said after a few moments.

He stood and patted my arm and then he left.

I was alone. And in some ways would be so forever.

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