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A Wake Up Call

Eric Garcia

I wanna to say that I “had a sense of style,” but honestly, I’m in desperate need of some vans. Mom wouldn’t buy me them though, not until my non-brand air force 1 posing shoes bit the dust. I look down at my feet. Nope, not even dirty enough to persuade my parents I need new ones. Maybe I’ll run around the soccer field after work to make them seem beat up. They’re so white so it shouldn’t be that hard. Man, I wish my job actually paid me, so I can buy my own shoes.

Last summer, the manager of the day camp I went to asked me if I want to volunteer. At first I was unsure, since it will take away time from my PS3, but mom said it can lead to a future job. Plus, she wants me out of the house, so to her the stars seem to be aligning. Which leads me to walking in the blistering sun to the community center. Luckily it’s only five days a week, and since I’m doing something productive, video game time increases significantly on the weekends. What sucks is I have to wake up at 8 in the morning, it’s like going to school all over again. Actually I take that back, school is worse.

I finally reach the CCC (Campbell Community Center) and stop to take a break by the small skate park that sits along the track. I lean against a bench and watch kids practice their skate moves, doing kickflips and ollies. Keeping my laughter to a smirk as they lost balance and fell. I can’t help it, it’s funny to watch. Like those fail videos on youtube but in real life. I check my watch, oh shit 8:55am, I have to be there by 9. My dad always told me, if I wasn’t 5 minutes early, I was five minutes late. I run across the parking lot towards the small gym next to the public pool. I jump up the steps and head in through the door. As I thought, I’m the last one.

“You’re late Sprite!” Tank sarcastically yells at me from the other side of the gymnasium.

“Still got two minutes” I reply as I walk towards the folding table at the center of the gym. He shrugs and goes back to shooting a basketball. He was a tall and muscular dude, it’s easy to imagine him riding a Tank, so I’d say his name was right on the money. At the day camp, we didn’t use our real names for some reason. When I first started here I had no idea what my name would be until my friend pointed to my sprite bottle next to me, so I thought why not.

There are four other counselors that work here, and then there’s me, the runt, the Robin to their Justice League. They are all older than me, seniors in high school or college students. I’ve got like nothing in common with them. We sit on our phones and wait for the kids to arrive. Well, they do, I on the other hand pretend like

my phone can access Facebook. The campers start filling in slowly, and after 20 minutes of flying balls and occasional screaming, they all are here. We did the usual day camp activities; play games, water breaks, kids asking if my blood is soda, bee stings, and lunch. Before I knew it, the day is almost done. There's a Laker summer league game on live TV in a couple hours so I couldn't wait to get home.

It's 2:30 p.m. now, and the stragglers are finally clearing out. I look at Tank, who checks his watch and gives me the nod. I wave a quick hand in goodbye and head out the door. My dad said he would pick me up, so I immediately scan the area for a silver Ford Explorer truck. Instead, I see my tita's black SUV, with her standing outside waving at me. I start heading toward her, which is a little odd. Maybe dad was caught up at work again. She seems stressed, not her usual happy self. Her typical sunglasses were gone, her hair all jumbled up like she just got out of bed, and her signature Giants shirt is nowhere to be seen.

"We have to go," she said, her tone much more different than at family gatherings.

"Why?" I asked, my anxiety rising as if I was having an allergic reaction.

"It's your dad. He had a heart attack, c'mon get in the car."

Heart attack.

Those words hang in the air. A phrase that I only hear in Grey's Anatomy or read in a magazine. Not in reality. We climb into the car and drive off. The Laker game feels like a dream now. My face couldn't even make an expression and my smile was definitely not volunteering to change that. I felt worse than dying right before I could get the nuke in Modern Warfare 3. I sat with my head to the window, staring at the open road watching the cars fly by. When we reach the intersection, I wish that she would go straight towards the direction of my house. Like it's a normal day. Without any music to cover the uneasiness, we turn right.

As we drive down the freeway, I think about how my dad would lecture me on the ride home after monthly haircuts, telling me about how chores aren't connected to allowance, and how it builds character. I didn't enjoy them much, but right now, I yearn for his rambling. After what felt like an eternity, we arrive at the hospital. I hop out of the car and gaze up at the massive white building. It felt ominous, or maybe that was just me. My tita gives me a nudge and we go through the sliding doors toward the the secretary's desk. Tita asks for my dad, "Rolando Garcia." Hearing his full name, sent a chill down my spine. It was similar to when my mom sharply hisses my name when she would see unwashed dishes after a long day at work. The nurse points down the left hallway, we said thank you and head off. Not too long after, the corridor opens up into a big room with chairs lined up row by row. Like a graduation, but far from the same feeling. Straight in the dead center, was my

family. Cousins, uncles, and even close friends were all together. My twin cousins trying to keep the atmosphere lively while my aunts sat down to pray. Normally, I would want to go and say hi, but now all I want to do was walk right by them. My mom stands in the middle of them. Her short curly brown hair in order, business casual, like she just got off work. But the brown in her eyes were unusually dull and glassy, making it evident that everything was a facade. When we made eye contact, she flashes a slight smile as she walks over, pulling me into hug.

“Hey,” she said calmly, just like how she says it when I come home from school.

I look up and ask, “Where’s dad?”

She purses her lips, “Come on, he wants to see you.” With that, she takes my hand and we head to the hallway labeled “Emergency rooms.” I glance over my shoulder as the doors close, barely catching a glimpse of my family as they settle into place. I turn my head back around to the doctors running in all sorts of directions as we pass them. I get a pat on the head,

“You okay?” My mom asks me,

“Yeah.” I answer back. Which was the only word I could think of. I don’t know how I felt, it was all happening so fast, it didn’t seem real to me yet. I barely understood algebra, so this was way too much to process. We stop. Room 1152 is shown above, my mom hesitates at first, hand clutching the doorknob. Then, she opens the door and it hits me all at once. Lying in a lonely room, with machines all around him, is my dad. Every limb on his body, tubes circle around them. Up his nose and in his mouth as well. He looks like Goku when he was severely injured. I can’t speak, I can’t move, I can’t even think. I just stare.

“H-H-Hey” He croaks, it was so weak and frail. Not the strong and firm voice I knew. It was different from how he would hiss at me in the middle of the night for making too much noise. His voice sank through my skin and into my bones. I want to cry, but I’m in shock. I don’t know what to do. The doctor came in soon after and starts talking with my mom.

“We have to do a quintuple bypass surgery.” The doctor tell my parents.

I don’t have any idea what he was talking about, but I knew surgery was a big deal. They continue to discuss details that I can’t keep track of. I just kinda awkwardly stood in the corner not knowing what I should do. I look up at the clock on the left hand side of the room. It’s 4:30 p.m. and it definitely did not feel like it. I shook my eyes off the clock and saw the doctor getting up ready to leave. My mom gestures me to come over to her, I walk over as he left the room.

“It’s time to go, we’ll see dad later,” my mom told me. Like the “heart attack,” the “later” made me feel

uneasy, like standing on pins and needles. I look at my dad, he gave me a small grin,

“I’ll see you later bud.”

“Love you” I silently blurt out. It was all I could muster.

He raises two of his fingers as if to wave. Mom went over and gave him a kiss on the forehead, and we head out the door. I try to glance back, but unlike before, the doors had already shut.