

Answers at Last

He remembered a time the sun shone more brightly, warming his skin in wide open spaces. Out west. It was so many years ago. High country. The stubble of the field after harvest cracking under his boots, the dry chaff scattered on the ground, the reassuring handle of the tractor as he drove it back to its resting place at the end of the day. It seemed unreal now. That the sky had been so vast. That times had been so simple. That his daughter had been alive.

The details of the accident were so sharp they hurt, even after he had reviewed them over and over again. Even after all the years gone by. Her departure compressed the wide sky into a small point, dimmed the sun, made his lungs flat and hard to fill. He barely noticed the sawtooth outline of the front range anymore. That such a small person could have held up the sky, and made everything make so much sense, was something he had not even noticed until she was gone. How could he have possibly failed to notice how essential, how powerful she was. The strength in her thin arms. The warmth of her soft breath as he tucked her in at night. Her lean legs, and how quickly she ran the length of their first field. Her fine hair, impossible to comb or braid, like cornsilk to the touch, and so they kept it bobbed. *Just easier like that*, her mother had said. *Mine was long, but mine was thicker.*

Eventually he and Andrea separated, the shared pain too hard to even mention, their days circumscribed by all the taboo topics. Where she was. How it happened. *Why was her mother not there? Where was her father? Did she feel pain? When did her eyes close? Was the sky the last thing she saw?* It had been a sunny day, a warm day. He remembered the hard plastic chairs in the foyer of the hospital morgue, waiting for the coroner to accompany them in to view and identify her. The cold blast of refrigerated air. The cool ceramic of her cheek. *It's her*, he'd told the woman.

He moved west, west, west, to the next biggest city, and found himself alone on wet nights, endless wet nights of wet winters that lasted for months with no light. It matched his state: it was fine. It was right to be in a place that was so grey, and dreary. He found work at a garage, and his knowledge of motors and machines came in handy. But Becca and Andrea were his first thought upon waking, and his last before he went to sleep. Their faces projected onto every scene like a ghostly hologram. There was no way to make it whole. There was no way to know.

One day in May, his cell rang. When he answered, he recognized the voice of the crown attorney from their previous conversations.

“Wanted to let you know,” the man said, after they exchanged pleasantries, “that the damndest thing has come up. Some local boys had one of those drones, with a, with a camera. They thought they were getting footage of one of their dogs doing something. It just happened to be overhead the day that Becca...” his voice trailed off. “We have footage.”