

Songs for Dad

Sophie Corbissero

My body rocks side to side as we drive over the potholed highway of I-275, Led Zeppelin's *Black Dog* intermixing with the sound of the car's tires hitting the asphalt. Whirls of light fill the raindrop-ridden windows and paint the passing buildings beautiful colors of red and yellow. I can still feel the stickiness of the venue on my hands, or maybe it's just tape residue from the microphone. My right hand is still slightly cupped as if the mic were still nestled in my fingers as it had been for the past three hours. I flex each finger to try to shake out the leftover nerves from the performance. Stage fright is no stranger to my fourteen-year-old self, despite being the lead singer in my band's performance tonight. A sea full of aged faces staring back at me will never fail to push pools of bile to the tip of my tongue.

It went well. That's what Mom kept saying. "You did great, be proud of yourself". A suppressed chuckle came from the direction of my father before getting in the car, and I did what I'd learned to do best— ignore him. He came to the show. Mom said I should be grateful for that, even though I told her multiple times that I didn't want him coming tonight. "Why wouldn't you want your whole family there to support you?" she asked throughout the week. "Why would you want your husband to publicly embarrass you?" I wanted to ask back. But I never did. I let her bring the drunken shell of a husband she once had with her to the venue.

He came in his normal attire. A shirt made of imitation denim with dark blue jeans and chocolate brown steel-toed boots. Dressed like *a real workin' man*, as he would say. I couldn't tell the last time he shaved, but I knew he was well overdue. I hated hugging his scruff. It's as sharp as his attacks and as painful as his lack of accountability. But I smiled. I went on with my

rehearsal and tried to have the best show I could, even though he was there. I should have known that would never be possible with him in the crowd.

Throughout the entire show, he loudly spoke of his distaste for everything but the alcohol he was drinking and the lead guitarist. “These kids suck,” I heard him say in between the sets. Even behind the curtain, I could hear him blab about his theories that the government is spying on him and how social media is stealing your DNA. Three separate times, I watched Mom try to pull him back onto his stool as he kept standing to talk during the performance. Despite not wanting him there, I thought this would be the show he’d enjoy. *Anti-Everything* was the theme for tonight’s performance. Songs from Creedence Clearwater, Muse, and Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young were all on the setlist. I figured that even if he didn’t support me, he could find enjoyment in the songs.

I fly a few inches in the air as the Jeep rolls up our hilled driveway and stops in front of the two-door garage. The passenger door of the car gets slammed, and heavy steps are made towards the back gate. Almost immediately, the car feels lighter. Mom pauses momentarily before grabbing her black leather purse and heading towards the gate—towards my father. Even though my parents flock back inside our home, my legs are glued to the seat beneath me. In the car, it is quiet. In the car, it is safe. In the car, I am free.

I hear the screendoor’s latch smack against the frame and slowly close. Small whirs and clicks sing throughout the car as each mechanism fully turns off, and the silence of the outside world makes me more uncomfortable than my screaming parents. I open the car door one

centimeter at a time, preparing for the inevitable. Wet rocks poke the soles of my shoes with each step I take closer to the house, the scent of dread following suit. Through the back door, I see them. My mom stands with her hands flailing in the air as she lectures my father. He sits on the raggedy brown couch with a *Bud Light* in one hand and a remote in the other.

In moments like these, I realize how dependent I am. I can't just get in my car and drive somewhere peaceful. I'm not even old enough to have my permit, and we wouldn't have the money to get me a car if I were. I'll keep dreaming of the time when I can escape my father's wrath on my terms, but for now, I take my final breaths of calm air and pull open the door of my tumultuous home.

The sound of the television is an opposite octave of my parents' argument, creating a haunting harmony. The head-splitting bark of my dogs comes in as the falsetto. The tattered green carpet is riddled with mud stains and broken rawhide that spreads across the entire living room floor. My father blows thick clouds of cigarette smoke from the couch he occupies, making the room feel suffocating. Tar and ammonia settle against my skin, and I feel like I need another shower. Mom turns back to me in disbelief and makes her first demand of the night, "Go to your room. Now."

"No, come on, Christine, let's ask the princess." My father shoots. Fumes of bourbon and beer waltz together through the air and burn the hairs of my nostrils.

"Pete, leave her alone."

"No," He raises himself from the couch and fires a look of contempt my way. "Did I *embarrass* you? Was Mommy's little drama queen embarrassed by her Dad?"

Sour bile creeps onto my tongue as my mom and I exchange looks. Her eyes are telling me, *don't engage*. Mine are telling her, *I'm fucking done with him*.

“Yes.”

The drunken smirk on his reddened face peels off when he crooks his neck towards me.

“What?”

Tears are already welling in my eyes as they often do when speaking to him, and my voice nears a quiver as I find the courage to stand up for myself and my mom. “You *embarrassed* me. Whose bright idea was it to drink an entire bottle of bourbon before their daughter’s show even opened? *You*. Who talked over the entire set because they are so self-centered that they think their opinions are more important than the show they are at? *You*. Who was so drunk they could barely stay in their seat without falling? *You*.”

My fingers are molten steel, and my face burns cold. A bead of sweat trickles down the front of my forehead.

A slight, *hmpf* is followed by a chuckle as my father makes his way into the dining room. “I only went for the beer and the guitar player anyway.”

My mom’s eyes meet mine, and I can hear her apology for his actions without words being spoken. “Pete, that is horrible to say. You went to support your daughter. Tell her that”

He reappears in the wooden door frame that separates the two rooms and rubs his back against the wood, trying to scratch the itch that alcohol never could reach. “No. You want me to be honest with her? I will,” he slurs towards me. “I went for the fucking drinks. I went because that little guitar player is the most talented and entertaining person in the band. *You*? Why would I waste my time watching *you* perform? A sad little girl with no talent and no future doesn’t sound entertaining to me.”

Blood pours out of my ears, and resentment stabs my chest. Salty metal fills my mouth from biting the side of my cheek so hard. I give my mom one last glance before charging towards my father.

“Sophie, don’t.” She screams and runs to hold me back.

“No. *Fuck you*,” I scream at him, finger wagging in his face as my mom holds my left arm back. “How *dare* you? I *hate* you. Why don’t you just go out to the garage and drink yourself to death like your mother did?”

I stand in front of him, and a mixture of heavy pants and sobs escapes from my mouth. Tears and sweat run into my mouth. The only sound I can hear is my labored breathing. The sound of the commercials, of the dogs, of the city outside— all of it dissipates, and the room stands still between my father and me. Heavy air coats my skin and enters my mouth with each gasp of air I take.

“I never wanted a third child,” he starts, the most menacing look behind his eyes, “and I sure as fuck *never* loved you.”

As soon as the sentence leaves his mouth, he turns on his heels and heads out the back door. My ears buzz and make me question if I heard him properly. Maybe they are still adjusting from the booming amp I stood next to. The look of pure hopelessness and disgust on my mom’s face tells me otherwise.

She pulls me into her warmth and kisses the top of my head. A torrent of tears escapes my eyes, and I crumble in her arms. “It’s ok, baby,” she says while stroking my scalp, “He doesn’t mean it.”

I stand broken in my mother’s arms as my father fulfills his lifelong prophecy in the garage. A beer in one hand, my heart in the other.