

I began the day, groggily, reaching for the wired headphones sprawled out on my floor in an attempt to drown out the sound of my upstairs neighbor's heavy footsteps and muffled arguments that reverberated off their floor (and my ceiling), before drifting back into a half-sleep, which kept getting interrupted by my phone's ten blaring alarms that I continued to snooze. This day did not begin differently from any other day I've had since moving to Boston, and despite the annoyance that the sound of one of the girls having loud post-argument-sex with her boyfriend brought me, it also brought me a sense of comfort through the act of repetition, of schedule, of knowing what is going to happen the night before it begins. At fourteen, there was no preparation when, in the middle of my last period (Algebra I with Mrs. Allen, who was fired later that year for having an entire class-full of students fail her course), that I discovered my father was being rushed to Cleveland's Level 1 Trauma Center at Metro Health for being in the eye of an explosion at the steel mill he called work.

A text from my mother in our family group chat, which, ironically enough, never included my father, informed me that my brother would be waiting outside to take me straight home from school. My father was blown from thirty feet in the air and twenty feet back into a steel beam, cracking his helmet and burning him through fire-retardant clothes after the water he had been warning his bosses about finally dripped a bit too much over the tundish of molten steel below, and swept him up in its wake. I felt nothing. I felt everything. I was paralyzed with the thought that he could have died in such a horrific and painful way, just trying to provide for his family. I was emboldened by the idea that his sharp tongue, pungent breath, yeast-filled stomach, and unloving rage would finally be far from my family, my life, my happiness, and sanity. I daydreamed about what it would be like for my mother to reenter the dating scene for the first time since she was 18. I fantasized about having a parental figure in my life who would deliver flowers to my class on Valentine's Day, like the girl in my AP Lit class' dad did. I wanted none of it. I craved it all. He survived—my father. Somehow, without a single broken bone. Only a diagnosis of post-concussive syndrome, which worsened with the concoction of alcohol and any pill he could find in our medicine cabinet, which he called treatment.

He's been sober for six years. The explosion took place only three before that. Even then, even so, even now, I still think about him getting blown up at times. I think about it when he has to get surgery to unclog the veins in his legs. Or when I see a photo, more prominent than any of my memories, of me without my father during homecoming pictures— I was the only child's he didn't attend. When my hands tremor from a Redbull the same way his used to from a lack of Bud Light coursing through his veins. Then and now, here and there. The contrast still brightens and darkens my emotions all at once. Animosity burrows into my skin, resides deep in my bones. Relief buzzes around my head like a ladybug determined to bring me luck. I am thankful he lived and that I wouldn't have to process such complicated grief. I am resentful that the lack of alcohol never changed his frigid demeanor. I love my father. I hate my father. I am my father. I didn't want him dead. No. But I hated that he survived.