

## Inheritance of Silence

The mall is usually a loud and busy place during winter break, but that day it felt like the world had hit pause. I was at the ear-piercing counter, holding my birth certificate to prove I was really my mom's daughter since our last names were different. And then I froze, unable to move my eyes from the name of my biological father on my birth certificate staring right back at me.

I had always known he existed seeing as I shared a last name with him instead of my "true" family. The only problem was that up until that fateful day, I had never known his full name, too scared to ever ask my mother about him since he was practically dead to the both of us. Since I did not have a phone at the time, I memorized his name so that I could later look him up on my computer or on a friend's phone.

Within a week...I had found him.

It was strange to see *my* last name attached to a ghost through a screen. Despite our shared DNA, he still was just a stranger. I was sitting in the back of English class, using the phone I had borrowed from a friend, my heart racing frantically while I typed his name into the social media platform. As soon as I had pressed search my heart practically left my body. I scrolled through the years of pictures from a life I never got the chance to witness or be part of. The screen kept scrolling... until it finally stopped, having hit the very beginning of its timeline. I sat there staring at the screen, my thumb frozen in place as it hovered over the very first post. It was a grainy and pixelated picture of this stranger meant to be my father, holding a little girl in a pink tutu. And then it clicked.

The the little girl... was me.

After having let the wave of emotions settle in my mind and heart, I scrolled back up to a picture that had also caught my eye. It was my biological dad with a girl in her late teens and a boy who looked no older than ten. My siblings. I immediately started searching for my sister's profile through people my father followed.

And there she was.

Standing, smiling in pictures reflecting a life I had never known could have been a possibility for me. She seemed so happy, running around with our younger brother in these frozen moments of time. I continued scrolling until I found a picture that made my heart drop. She was holding a newborn, wrapped in blankets. The comments were filled

with other family members, sending their love and congratulations. Their words blurred together, meaningless.

What mattered was this:

I had an older sister.

And she had a baby.

I had always wanted to be an aunt.

I just didn't know I would have to miss it.

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