

Reconciliation

by Katy Bowman

Claire had left her father's wallet on his dresser. He had always kept it there, next to the little dish that he had kept his pocket change in and in front of the picture of her mother. The dish and the picture had been placed in boxes already, but the wallet was still there, one final thing for Claire to go through before leaving her father's house for the last time.

The past couple of weeks had been rough. Going through all of her father's possessions, deciding what to keep and what to sell or donate or simply pitch, these were decisions that Claire had not at all felt prepared to deal with. Deciding what is important from the life of a man that you haven't spoken to in ten years was a task that had seemed impossible at the outset. But now, here she stood, having done just that. She was surprised at how easy it had been, at how much she had remembered, how much she regretted. If I hadn't been so stupid, she thought, picking up the wallet. At the time, telling her father that she was a lesbian seemed so important, so vital. In a way, she had wanted to test him, to see where his loyalty really lay. In all the years after, after he had kicked her out of the house, stopped paying for college, stopped speaking to her, she had never once thought that he might regret what he had said and done. She did not regret what she had done, either. Until now. Until she had seen what her father's life had become.

She ran her finger along the rough, worn edges of the wallet and rubbed the smooth grain of the leather, polished from years of being sat on, pulled from his pocket, slid back in, opened, closed. She couldn't be sure, but the wallet looked exactly like the one she remembered him carrying when she was younger. It was possible that he had bought a new one, a replica of the old, but knowing her father it was also possible that this was the original. She remembered him pulling bills out of it when she was a teenager

headed for the mall or the movies, giving her an admonishing look as she snatched the bills from his hand.

Claire sat down on the bed, the bare mattress creaking under her weight, and opened the wallet. There were a couple of credit cards, a few discount cards, and his driver's license. She pulled the license from its pocket and studied the picture. It didn't look at all like the man she remembered, except for the smile. The teeth were different, thanks to dentures, but the wrinkles that formed at the corners of his mouth and the way that his eyes were almost squinted shut were exactly the same. She smiled and put it back. Opening the back of the wallet, she found a thin stack of 20s, all crisp and neatly piled together. She pulled them out to count them and was surprised when something landed on top of her bare foot. She laid the money aside and leaned over to pick up the fallen object.

She could tell it was a picture before she even opened it, the thickness and texture of the paper giving it away. She unfolded it and felt as though the wind had been knocked out of her. The picture was one she did not remember seeing, not in the last few days as she had been going through things and not in her childhood around the house. In it, she was sitting on top of her father's shoulders. She must have been around 2 or 3 years old. The smile on her face stretched for miles; in fact it looked as though she was laughing. Her father was holding a bunch of balloons and had his head tilted slightly back, smiling up at her as best he could. The two of them looked so happy, so joyful.

For the first time since she had heard the news about her father's death, Claire began to cry. She felt the tears forming at the corners of her eyes, the lump rising steadily in her throat, and she just let it come. She didn't even try to wipe away the salty droplets that were now running down her cheeks, down her chin, falling into her lap.

