

## I Loved Her First

By Jocelyn

Losing things in life is difficult, and it's a thousand times more excruciating when you're young. Whether it's a toy, a game, or something in between, a temper tantrum and extreme confusion are usually the results. What happens when what you lose isn't a material object, but a person? How do you make sense of it?

In all honesty, I don't personally think anyone can make sense of it, despite age or maturity level. They cope, but they do not accept. They go on day by day wondering if that person's "final straw" was caused by something they did. They blame themselves without question. Self-blame, a killer mindset. Every mistake they ever made in that relationship races back to their thoughts without limitations. It's eating them alive but no one can see interior conflict through an exterior viewpoint.

Every conversation that ended in a fight. Every cruel thing they said to the person who is now gone for good that you get choked up over when you see the slightest thing that reminds them of how dumb it was to mutter something so impolite. The worst feeling that hurts more than anything is not fully realizing they were showing signs.

But in our last deep conversation, you cried. I've only seen you cry a handful of times for the thirteen years I've known you. This time is different, though. I've never seen your 'tough guy' mentality be broken down like a wall by an unseen force right in front of my eyes. You said to stick up for the underdog. Be the person with the correct morals in the corrupt world. Help people in need. I didn't think much of it.

I was thirteen, in my room drawing or finishing some kind of work that seemed to be more important than looking at you because at the time I was so angry at you. You kept talking and were getting choked up and, to this day, I beat myself up over not listening attentively to every word you spoke. I looked at you, finally. I have never seen eyes so beautiful but so broken. A blue-green design hazy with tears that could break your heart with just one glance. You told me to open up my laptop; you wanted to show me two songs.

The first was Room at the Top by Tom Petty, a classic country song with a title so simple that I wish I could've caught on to the deeper meaning hidden between the letters. You talked deeply about what it meant to you, but the next thing you told me to search was called I Loved Her First by Heartland, and what you said will be burned into my memory until the end of my days, your tone of voice and all. "Jocie, if I don't make it to your wedding, I want you to play this song." "But dad, why wouldn't you make it?" "Just in case." I had never cried harder before that moment. And every time I work up the nerve to listen to that song I cry even harder.

But then I asked you the dying question and you lied. My question was if you were thinking of suicide.

On September third, two-thousand twelve, about three or four days after our last good day, you took it upon yourself to leave this earth by your own hand. I cannot begin to elaborate on how

angry I was at you. I never get that angry besides when people talk badly of you. I stand up for myself now. You aren't here to defend yourself so I take it upon myself to do it. I have never and I will never let someone say you were 'selfish, a sinner, or crazy' because you weren't. You were my dad, the best dad. You did everything you could for anyone and everyone in need without even asking for a thank you.

And to this day, I cry and get choked up by telling your story. And to this day I am scared to drive the truck you left me without your guidance. And to this day I know you loved me first, and I love you in return. I am so proud of you, despite contradiction.