

The Old Trunk

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Suddenly it all made sense. Every story he told, or wasn't able to tell, I realized what it meant to him. They weren't just stories. This wasn't a dream. He had been there. He had heard it all, seen it all, and tasted the bitter fullness of it all. All I could hear was the sound of his thick-accented voice. When all he could hear were the sounds of war.

His laugh echoed in my mind and I could feel my heart jump up into my throat as I folded the last of the decorative flags and placed it in the trunk. The colorful stitching, "Iceland, 1940," glared up at me. I remembered the fur-covered mittens lying in the bottom of the trunk and could see him wearing them. Each piece held its own story; stories that I would never hear again. I picked up the parachute panel and wondered if he ever had to use it. And if he did, what made him need it? Looking at all the different pieces of war gear, I felt like I was looking at a piece of his soul....one that I would never be able to look into again.

My thoughts were interrupted by the sound of footsteps on the creaky floors. As I tried, and failed, to wipe away the tears, a gentle hand rested on my shoulder. I looked up to see her tear filled eyes looking down at me.

"I know it's hard, baby," she whispered as she knelt down beside me.

I tried to pull an innocent and puzzled look. I failed.

"I've been watching you," she said with a smile.

"Why am I such an open book? I can't hide anything."

"I wish I knew how to comfort you," she said.

For the first time, I realized that this was so much harder for her.

"You're the one that needs comforting. It was your father, not mine."

A swarm of questions to flood my mind. Why did it have to happen now, now when everything

was already hard? Why did we have to be able to handle one more thing? Couldn't it have waited? He had lived six years longer than any of the doctors had expected, what made him die now?

"God, couldn't you have let it wait?" I kept asking. *"We were all so happy! What am I supposed to do with this hole You've left in me? How can I be a comfort, when I need so much comforting myself?"*

The knowledge of somebody talking to him every day, hearing his sweet voice over the phone, or hearing how he sounded made the day complete. What would we do now that it couldn't happen again? Everyday that week felt unfinished. "Did anyone call Grandpa today? How's he doing?" I constantly wanted to ask, but I couldn't. I could feel every bit of faith that had sustained me through this week shaking. Was God really there? Did He care about what my family was being put through? If He cared, how could He let it happen?

"I know sometimes it's hard to trust that God has it all in control," she said with a weak smile.

"God it hurts!"

"I don't know why this had to be the time," she whispered, wiping away a tear. "But, I know one thing...my Papa is in a place where he will never have another heart attack, surgery, pain, or tear."

"God, how can I trust You when You allow things to hurt so bad?"

I looked down at the parachute panel in my hand and nodded, trying my best to look as though I understood and believed with full heart what she said. Then I felt her hand under my chin as she pulled my face up to look at her again, something she hadn't done since I was ten. The tears were gone and her face determined.

"You've been such a trooper this whole week!" she said. "Don't quit on me now."

"God, I can't do anymore! I've got nothing left to give!"

"I'm alright, Momma," somehow choked out.

"No, you're not," she said with a slight chuckle as she stood up, "none of us are. Healing takes time. But, it will come. Keep fighting, my little soldier."

“Am I a really a solider?”

“Mom!” one of the children called from outside.

“I’ll be back,” she said with a smile.

Funny how all my questions were answered with one look in her eyes. Yes, God was real, and He did care. Everything about her spoke His presence and reality. How did she do it? How could she, of all people, the one who hurt the most, keep her flame of faith burning bright?

My thoughts were interrupted by the phone in my pocket starting to vibrate. I answered it to hear a cheerful voice on the other side.

“Hey, cute girl!” my sister said, “how ya doin’?”

“Alright, I guess.”

I quickly spilled out as many details as I could about the trunk filled with the old war equipment. I tried to not give away how badly everything inside of me was hurting.

“I *got* to pack them in the trunk.” I choked out.

“Oh my goodness, girly!” she said with a great deal of excitement, “I would give anything to have been able to do that!”

Suddenly, it hit me. This was an amazing opportunity I had been given. Who else had been given the opportunity to have this look into his life? This look into his past, imagining the story that each piece of equipment held, helped me to understand him more in death than I ever did in life.

“Hey, hon, I gotta go,” I said calmly. “I need to finish here. Will call ya tonight.”

“Right!” she said “Keep smiling, it’ll help you!”

“Sure thing!” I laughed.

After hanging up, I folded the parachute panel and placed it on top of the rest of things in the trunk. One more look was all I needed. With both hands I shut the trunk. It was funny the feeling I got when the lid finally clicked shut. It wasn’t at all what I expected it to be. Instead of a feeling of returning despair and pain, it was gratitude and peace.

I walked outside and looked around at the familiar backyard. I remembered all the childhood days that we spent together here. The children all ran up with smiles as they held out the berries they had picked from the bushes.

“So many memories come from just looking at them,” mom said, looking over my shoulder.

“Yeah,” I whispered as I turned to look at her.

“Yes, I am a soldier, and I follow the greatest of Generals!”

For the first time in this ordeal, I pulled a genuine smile. All week I had only wanted this, what I had considered to be a nightmare, to end. But, it wasn't a nightmare anymore. I found myself looking forward to the rest of this trip. Who could tell what other stories I would uncover?

“Memories flood this place,” I said, “but, I wouldn't give them up for anything!”