

Written by Addison Rahmlow

What Wednesday Told Me

[April 1967]

Papa didn't like it when I wore blue. He didn't like the sky.

Blue, blue is no good, he'd say to me, jumbled words simmering beneath his breath, words that had meaning to no one except for him. *No blue*.

And so I sifted through my closet, peeling apart linen clogged sweaters, shoving a box labeled Blue underneath my bed into the darkest corner where only stray socks and broken pencils ended up. I took down my drawings, rubbed my thumb over the hole in the drywall, looked at the sketched cerulean sky and wished that it would help, wished it would get better, wished for the before.

Wished that the Wednesday when the man on T.V said the numbers that made his face mold into a permanent look of defeat never happened. Wished that he never gathered his memories in a bag, never had to pack up his room, never had to leave us.

Did you know that color is only an illusion? he had said to me, before we fell, before he left. We were sitting on the support beams of the barn atop of prickly mounds of honey-colored hay, peeling ears of corn until our fingers grew numb.

An illusion? I had asked, setting down the stalk, hugging my knees to my chest.

He nodded, looking at the sky. *Yes. We only see it because of the light.*

I scooted closer to him, looking at the small hole in the roof where a sliver of blue sky crawled through, a sunbeam illuminating the speckled barn.

An illusion, I'd whispered.

And then he left.

After he had gone, leaving us alone in our full but empty house brimming with visiting great aunts that smelled of baby powder and beets, telling us that it would be fine, Mama would drift into a daze. She'd aimlessly stir her orange-flavored tea that wasn't orange-colored -it was more of a murky brown- looking at the whirring oven, not thinking, not doing, just there. *An illusion*, I'd whisper under my breath, letting his voice echo inside of me, trying not to forget him, this so-called temporary thing; *An illusion*.

Four days after Christmas the first letter came. Brief, but still there, still him. It said he couldn't say much, didn't have a lot of time and hoped to come home soon, hoped to see me. It said that he would try to return within the year, see what he could do, it was only for now, wouldn't last.

And so we waited. We waited through more Wednesdays where the man on T.V called more numbers, sent more Papas away. We waited, going on with our lives, pretending that everything was okay when it wasn't.

Every week Ms. Archer would hobble up our front steps, her toes pointed outwards like a lopsided duck, blackberry pie in a rusted tin case. *I'm sure he's fine*, she'd say to Mama, squeezing her hand, glasses dropping off the bridge of her nose. *I'm sure he's fine*.

Mama nodded, sighed, *Yeah*.

My slippered feet would tiptoe down the flickering hallway, slump against the tile floor, and draw circles against the geometrical patterns as I listened to them talk. Listened to see if Papa was coming back, coming home.

But soon spring threaded into summer, along with sticky air and fern smeared clothes, still no sign of his return. My days were spent in the hayloft, eyes fixed on the hole in the ceiling, pencil scribbling across colorless pages.

Take these three dollars, Mama had said to me that July, placing the crinkled bills into my hands, *And get some milk and eggs from Mr. Fletcher. We're out.*

I shook my head yes, slipped the money into my back pocket, and swung my legs over the side of our metallic red bike, pedaling down the outstretched driveway, evergreen branches sweeping by my side, brushing my cheek.

If you listen, Papa once said to me, *You can hear the trees talking to you. They're telling you stories.*

Of what? I asked, clasping his hand as we walked through the fields.

Why of themselves of course, what they saw.

What did they see Papa?

Shh, listen. He closed his eyes, the wind nipping our cheeks, snowflakes melting as they poked our hot skin.

And then he left.

Mr. Fletcher was out of eggs and milk when I arrived that Wednesday in July, said that the coyote had gotten into the pen, milk was sold for the week. The trees told me it was bad luck.

Exactly three months later the mailman came, shuffling his feet back and forth as he handed Mama an envelope, sealed with a crisp red sticker. She shoed him off, hand floating mid-air, and tore the manilla paper, letting it drift to the ground, mouth ajar. I peered up at her, and she nodded, squeezing my hand as I looked at the sky.



He came home on a Wednesday, purple droops circled beneath his eyes, canvas bag in hand. *Blue,* he had whispered beneath his breath as he stepped into the doorway, pointing at my

shirt. *Blue*. He shook his head, rubbed a swollen hand over his face, and limped down the hall towards his room, *no blue, no blue*.

I asked Mama what was wrong, why didn't he want to see me? She stared at the uneven drywall, eyes glossed over, breathing short and steady. *He's just tired*, she had told me, as if trying to convince herself of it, *Yeah, just tired*.

Winter came and went, but the Blue didn't. The doctor said it was a phase, grief. Said it would be over soon.

I tried to talk to him, sat next to his side, listened to him murmur a series of words on a broken record: *Blue. Thomas. Sky. Planes. Blue*.

Papa, I had whispered, grasping his worn hand as he sat, *Papa did you know that color is only an illusion?*

At this, he stopped, looked me in the eye for the first time since he came home. *An illusion?*

Yes, Papa, it's just an illusion, we only see it because of the light. I had then paused, looked out the window. *The blue, it's not actually there, it's not real. Don't you remember?*

No, he said, *No. No blue*. He shook his head, got up, yanked down the blinds, louder this time. *No blue!*

And so that's how it went.

Come the first Wednesday of April, everything blue was gone. Blue clothes, blue towels, blue cups, plates, blankets, Blue.

Mama stopped coming out of her room, Papa stopped eating, stopped getting up. He began to grow feverish and frail, barely blinking, barely breathing.

It takes four years for a star's light to reach us, Papa had told me when I was younger, as we looked out the window at the swerving constellations that dotted the canvased night sky.

Four years?

Yes, four years.

Really?

Uh-huh. He stopped. *You see that star right there?*

Yes.

It might have already burned out, shattered into millions of little fragments, giving way to new stars, new lives. But because it takes so long to reach us, we don't know if it's actually there.



He left again on Wednesday morning. But this time he joined the stars.

It said in his will that he didn't want a funeral, but Mama refused as she usually did. Said that he would have a proper goodbye.

When the singing started, I walked out, I didn't like the way the echo pulsed in the background, the faded reminiscence of him there but not there.

Did you know that color is only an illusion?

An illusion?

If you listen, you can hear the trees talking to you, they're telling you stories.

Of what?

It takes four years for a star's light to reach us.

Four years?

Four years.

Four years, four years.

My ebony-colored dress creased in the wind as I ran back home, slouching against the front stoop as Blue snow curled around my fingers, smoothing against my skin. Moonlight illuminated the pavement while I watched Wednesday again. I watched the day where everything went wrong slowly seep into Thursday, telling me that even though he was gone, even though he burned out, he gave way to new stars, as his face waved hello in the Blue sky.

THE END