

“My father was abusive. Not to me—to my mother. He would get so angry when they fought that sometimes he would hit her. When that happened, he would spend the next week or two making up for it. He would do things like buy her flowers or take us out to a nice dinner. Sometimes he would buy me stuff because he knew I hated it when they fought. When I was a kid, I found myself looking forward to the nights they would fight. Because I knew if he hit her, the two weeks that followed would be great.” I pause. I’m not sure I’ve ever admitted that to myself. “Of course if I could, I would have made it to where he never touched her. But the abuse was inevitable with their marriage, and it became our norm. When I got older, I realized that not doing something about it made me just as guilty. I spent most of my life hating him for being such a bad person, but I’m not so sure I’m much better. Maybe we’re both bad people.”

Ravi looks over at me with a thoughtful expression. “Laxmi,” he says pointedly. “There is no such thing as bad people. We’re all just people who sometimes do bad things.”

I open my mouth to respond, but his words strike me silent. We’re all just people who sometimes do bad things. I guess that’s true in a way. No one is exclusively bad, nor is anyone exclusively good. Some are just forced to work harder at suppressing the bad.

“Your turn,” I tell him.

Based on his reaction, I think he might not want to play his own game. He sighs heavily and runs a hand through his hair. He opens his mouth to speak, but then clamps it shut again. He thinks for a bit, and then finally speaks. “I watched a little boy die tonight.” His voice is despondent. “He was only five years old. He and his little brother found a gun in his parents’ bedroom. The younger brother was holding it and it went off by accident.”

My stomach flips. I think this may be a little too much truth for me.

“There was nothing that could be done by the time he made it to the operating table. Everyone around—nurses, other doctors—they all felt so sorry for the family. ‘Those poor parents,’ they said. But when I had to walk into the waiting room and tell those parents that their child didn’t make it, I didn’t feel an ounce of sorrow for them. I wanted them to suffer. I wanted them to feel the weight of their ignorance for keeping a loaded gun within access of two innocent

children. I wanted them to know that not only did they just lose a child, they just ruined the entire life of the one who accidentally pulled the trigger.”

Jesus Christ. I wasn’t prepared for something so heavy.

I can’t even conceive how a family moves past that. “That poor boy’s brother,” I say. “I can’t imagine what that’s going to do to him—seeing something like that.”

Ravi flicks something off the knee of his jeans. “It’ll destroy him for life, that’s what it’ll do.”

I turn on my side to face him, lifting my head up onto my hand. “Is it hard? Seeing things like that every day?”

He gives his head a slight shake. “It should be a lot harder, but the more I’m around death, the more it just becomes a part of life. I’m not sure how I feel about that.” He makes eye contact with me again. “Give me another one,” he says. “I feel like mine was a little more twisted than yours.”

I disagree, but I tell him about the twisted thing I did a mere twelve hours ago.

“My mother asked me two days ago if I would deliver the eulogy at my father’s funeral today. I told her I didn’t feel comfortable—that I might be crying too hard to speak in front of a crowd—but that was a lie. I just didn’t want to do it because I feel like eulogies should be delivered by those who respected the deceased. And I didn’t much respect my father.”

“Did you do it?”

I nod. “Yeah. This morning.” I sit up and pull my legs beneath me as I face him. “You want to hear it?”

He smiles. “Absolutely.”

I fold my hands in my lap and inhale a breath. “I had no idea what to say. About an hour before the funeral, I told my mother I didn’t want to do it. She said it was simple and that my father would have wanted me to do it. She said all I had to do was walk up to the podium and say five great things about my father. So . . . that’s exactly what I did.”

Ravi lifts up onto his elbow, appearing even more interested. He can tell by the look on my face that it gets worse. “Oh, no, Laxmi. What did you do?”

“Here. Let me just reenact it for you.” I stand up and walk around to the other side of my chair. I stand tall and act like I’m looking out over the same crowded room I was met with this morning. I clear my throat.

“Hello. My name is Laxmi Bloom, daughter of the late Andrew Bloom. Thank you all for joining us today as we mourn his loss. I wanted to take a moment to honor his life by sharing with you five great things about my father. The first thing . . .”

I look down at Ravi and shrug. “That’s it.”

He sits up. “What do you mean?”

I take a seat on my lounge chair and lie back down. “I stood up there for two solid minutes without saying another word. There wasn’t one great thing I could say about that man—so I just stared silently at the crowd until my mother realized what I was doing and had my uncle remove me from the podium.”

Ravi tilts his head. “Are you kidding me? You gave the anti-eulogy at your own father’s funeral?”

I nod. “I’m not proud of it. I don’t think. I mean, if I had my way, he would have been a much better person and I would have stood up there and talked for an hour.”