

Not-So-Superglue

I sat down on the floor with the baseball glove in my hands, staring at the worn leather. My reflection in the cracked mirror caught my eye—the broken, crooked glass, the distorted image of myself—and I saw someone different. I saw the shattered husk of my own body, a gaping void that I created myself, enticing me to go deeper. *Why did I let things get this bad?*

In the past, I remember actually enjoying baseball, mostly because of my brother. Each time I saw him play, it lit a flame inside of me, a drive, a purpose. But the one thing I hated most about losing Little League games was the awkward car rides home; that sinking feeling of dread, knowing that your dad was disappointed about your performance, yet doesn't want to show it. Every exaggerated sigh, every right turn that felt sharper and faster than it should have, every glare in his rear-view mirror felt like a gut punch. But one day, the air felt different.

“야구의 어떤 점을 좋아하나요?” (roughly translates to “What do you even like about baseball?”), my dad suddenly said. I didn't understand most of what he had said, so I defaulted to “I don't know.”

“당신이 이 스포츠를 하기 위해 우리가 얼마나 많은 돈을 썼는지 아시나요?” (Do you know how much money we've spent for you to play this sport?).

“I don't know.”

“If you don't care about baseball, why don't you just quit?” His words surprised me, as he never used English to talk to me, almost like a last-ditch effort to reach me.

“I don't know.” But, this time, I *actually* didn't know; I didn't know why I held on; I didn't understand why I continued to pursue something I hated so deeply. And that got me thinking: *What if I've been living someone else's dream?*

After the game, he told me to practice my throws in front of my bathroom mirror. “You should see yourself out there. You look like a rookie. I didn’t raise you to be a rookie,” he said. *Like that makes me feel any better.* I stood in the hallway and evaluated the reflection in my cracked mirror. I should have been focusing on what I had been doing, fixing my form, fixing that weird side-hand throw, but I was looking at myself instead. *Why are you like this?* Through the cracks in the mirror, I saw my distorted, pathetic face, and I dug my half-chewed nails deep into my fist. His words echoed in my head: *Why don’t you just quit?* Out of anger, I tried my form again, throwing as hard as my measly 10-year-old self could. I heard the sound of glass plates shuffling around, so I thought Mom had made dinner. Then, I realized I wasn’t holding the ball anymore. I looked up. The mirror, this time, had been shattered. I looked down. A piece of glass as big as my palm had been released, residual shards were scattered everywhere, and the ball was spiraling into the sink. *Oh god, Dad’s definitely gonna kill me.* But, oddly enough, as much as I felt worried, I felt liberated in a way. I looked back up. I could no longer see my face, only the oak wood framing. I ran back into my room out of shame, threw my uniform and baseball cap through the closet door, and shut it tight. That piece of me never left that room ever again.

The first time my parents saw the shattered mirror, their eyes widened in disbelief. My dad sighed, long and heavy, like a weight pressing down on both of us. I could feel the silent disappointment swelling, thick and suffocating. A few days later, Dad came home with a tube of superglue and a plan to “fix” the mirror. I watched as he carefully glued the glass fragment back in place. The piece fit, but the cracks didn’t disappear. The breaks stayed, jagged lines still etched across the surface. And that missing piece, though reattached, sat slightly crooked—just off enough that I could never see my face quite right in it again, a distorted reflection.

It wasn't long before my parents tried to glue me back together in a similar fashion. They pushed me into golf, then viola, hoping something would stick, hoping something would fill the void that was left behind. But nothing felt right. Every "solution" had felt foreign to me, like wearing someone else's skin. *Is this really what I want to do for the rest of my life? Is this the best I can do?* Slowly, they, too, found their way into the closet--golf clubs gathering dust next to a viola case that was rarely opened. Each abandoned hobby became a headstone in the cemetery of my past, and the closet became my personal graveyard, a place where I left versions of myself to die.

The mirror remained in my bathroom, but every time I looked into it, I felt those cracks, like something essential had been broken, something that glue couldn't fix. I stopped looking at my reflection, not because of the mirror itself, but because what I saw reflected at me felt like someone I didn't recognize. The cracks weren't just in the glass; they were in me, too. I could feel myself slipping—away from my friends, away from my interests, and deeper into a state I didn't have the words for at the time. I thought I was just tired. But that weariness grew into something heavier, a kind of numbness that spread like the cracks in the mirror. I was too young to understand any of these emotions, let alone do anything about it, so I felt overwhelmed like I was suffocating, drowning in my bedsheets, moping around like a lifeless puppet. Little by little, it chipped away at everything that used to feel important. I stopped caring. About the school, about the things my parents wanted for me. It was as though every hobby I'd tried, every failure I'd faced, every piece of me that didn't "fit" had been thrown into the closet and locked away, and all I was left with was emptiness. My classmates would display their excitement and passion, saying, "When I grow up, I want to be an Astronaut!" but I was the only one who stuttered, the only one who felt stuck, weighed down by something I couldn't explain.

I didn't realize how heavy everything had gotten until one evening after school when I was alone in my room, staring blankly at my closet door. Like most kids have tried to do, I tried to hold my breath for as long as I could. I'd hold it until my lungs were screaming at me to breathe, until my heart was on the verge of stopping. But my body, on its own, clung to whatever light was left inside of me, and I took the deepest breath of my life, half relieved and half frustrated, as I was about to reach the 2-minute mark. *Why? Why do I cling on, when I've already let go, when there's no apparent reason? What is my body hiding from me? What am I hiding from myself?*

It had become a habit by then—sitting on my bed, lost in thought, staring blankly at my closet door, my mind circling around everything I hadn't accomplished. The closet wasn't just a storage space anymore; it had become a monument to all the ways I had let my parents down and all the ways I had let myself down. Each time I walked past it, I felt smaller. That night, though, something snapped. I found myself standing in front of the closet, my hand on the door handle, trembling with something between anger and exhaustion. I opened it, fully expecting to feel the usual wave of guilt and shame. Instead, as I rifled through the forgotten items—the old baseball glove, the barely-used viola case, the dusty golf clubs—I realized something: *these weren't symbols of failure*. They were just *things*. Things I had tried, things I had learned from, and things I had let go of.

I sat down on the floor with the glove in my hands, staring at the worn leather. My reflection in the cracked mirror caught my eye from across the room, and for the first time, I didn't turn away. I looked straight at it—the distorted image of myself—and I saw something different beneath my broken shell. I saw someone who had tried, even if it didn't work out. Someone who had let go of things that didn't feel right. The cracks were still there, but for the

first time, I realized they didn't diminish me. They were just part of the process; I wasn't broken. I was becoming.

And it hit me all at once, like a breath I had been holding for years: my identity couldn't be fixed by forcing myself into the shapes my parents or society expected. My identity wasn't in the things I had abandoned or failed at. It was in the choices I made and the experiences I carried with me. Those hobbies I had buried in the closet didn't define me—they were just stepping stones, things I had to try to figure out who I wasn't so I could find out who I was.

Every day, whenever I get ready for school, I realize the cracks are still there, the crooked glass piece still slightly off-kilter, but I don't hate what I see. My face has changed, my reflection is taller, and I can see myself above and beyond the broken parts. I noticed something important—that piece of glass my dad had glued back in? My heart is still there, lodged in that fractured piece. And even though it is imperfect, it is mine. Despite everything that's happened, that's still me.