

## Refined Like Silver

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My hands are shaking. I need to get out of here. It smells like bleach in this place, and it makes me want to vomit. Or maybe I feel like vomiting because of the whole reason I'm at this hospital. Either way, I need to take a break.

I look up at my mum, and she's talking in quiet whispers with Tim, the nurse. Gosh, I hate him. He gives you this look like you should expect death, like losing people is normal. I turn with a spin, unable to bear the stench of this looming tragedy anymore.

I open and close the door that separates my sick grandfather from the rest of the world. I don't look back.

My boots echo down the hall. I pass nurses and doctors and surgeons, wanting to scream and plead with them to fix the man in room 212.

I don't, though.

Instead, I keep my face still. If I don't move, I won't break. I finally reach the end of the hall, and I turn into the bathroom.

I take a peek at my reflection in the mirror, and pull a brush out of my bag. As I comb through my hair, I notice how long my brown locks have gotten, almost down to my waist. I braid my hair tightly, strand by strand, until it's one controlled rope.

It is at this moment that I think of a friend who also went through a loss. I wonder if they

felt as helpless as I do. I've been trained by my mum never to be helpless. My role is to be helpful, to see a need and fill it. Standing in this bathroom, I am completely helpless, and I am terrified of it.

I look at the mirror again, this time startled by the reflection I see. I stare the girl in the mirror down, willing her to move her lips, raise an eyebrow, or perhaps let a tear escape from her bright green eyes.

She doesn't move and neither do I.

"Who even are you?" I say out loud, a question to the person who faces me in my reflection.

No response.

"Who even are you?" I repeat, this time angry I am getting no reaction.

"WHO ARE YOU?" I finally scream. At last, the girl in the mirror lets out a gasp and begins to shake violently, tears springing from her eyes. I sink to the floor, ugly sobs escaping from my throat. I am not crying just because my grandfather is dying of cancer, but because of all the things in life I did not make time to mourn for.

I rip out my braid and strands fall to the floor. I am full of cracks, like chipped pottery, and the cold only makes them split wider.

I stand up, turning on the faucet, and the water runs warm.

Good.

I put my hands under the warm water and let them sit there as the water gets hotter. It gets so hot that I watch my hands go from white to pink to deep red. I flinch in pain as I feel the water burn my hands. The pain feels good, it is drowning out the wildfire that is burning in my mind and heart. The next morning when I wake up, something feels different inside me. I sit up

in my bed, trying to fathom what could possibly be changing. The sun is out and shining. My mom is home today.

In the kitchen there is classical music playing and my siblings are all eating breakfast.

“Mom, why didn’t you wake me? I could have made breakfast for everyone.”

My mum shakes her head and gives me a plate of food. I give her a big hug, relief spreading throughout my body. We stand there in each other’s arms for a long time, soaking up each other’s warmth, until our embrace is interrupted by my mum’s phone ringing. She looks over at the couch where her phone sits, vibrating. Across the room we can both see who is calling.

My dad.

She smiles and says reassuringly, “He told me he would call in the morning to check up on everything.”

I sit down on a bar stool at our kitchen island to eat my food, but I don’t take my eyes off my mum. She picks up the phone and doesn’t say anything for a few moments. I watch as she slowly sinks down on the couch, tears forming in her eyes. She sets her phone in her lap and shakes her head violently. Her hands are shaking as she looks me in the eyes.

“He’s home now.”

My lungs forget how to breathe.

I slip out of my chair and run down the stairs to the basement. My vision begins to cloud, and I trip over something. I look down to see what I tripped over, and realize it’s my ice skates.

Memories rush in as I recall all the times he took us skating. He taught me how to skate as a young child, and just a few short months ago he was still teaching me new skills and tricks.

I scream and throw my skates across the room, and I watch as they hit the wall and then clatter to the ground. My mum comes down the stairs and I feel her body come close to mine. This warmth doesn't burn.

I pick up the skates, slowly untying the laces. I'm full of cracks, I know that. This world is broken. But I am being refined like silver, purified each day. Every chip, every crack, feels purposeful, as if the Creator is shaping me, planting seeds deep in my soul that will grow in time.

I take a breath. My grandfather is gone, but for the first time in weeks, the cracks don't feel empty.