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The Perfect Fall

Zachary Bigelow

It's a crisp autumn day, one of those days which only comes around once or twice a year. The temperature is perfect, the trees turning every shade of fall one could imagine, and birds are outside, singing lovely tunes about flying south for the upcoming winter. The leaves are floating along with the light breeze, colorful, and without a care in the world. As if they're saying, "Life's a great journey, and we are all here for one ride." There wasn't a cloud in sight. These are the perfect kinds of autumn days, the ones where it seems nothing bad could ever happen. And yet, it was on one such day my son had died.

It isn't something I had expected, nor even something I had ever planned on having to expect. The last time I expected something was when I had found out I was pregnant with my baby, and on that very same day I had started planning out the rest of our lives together.

He would grow up to be an athletic young man but wouldn't play football because it's too dangerous. He would play something like soccer or baseball, so that he could keep his brain from becoming mush because of concussions. He would make varsity in whichever sport he chose, that wasn't football, and I would go to every single game regardless of my schedule.

He would grow up to be smart, book smart, and follow in his father's steps to become a world-famous scientist. He would cure a huge disease plaguing the world, like cancer or Alzheimer's. Large shoes to fill I'm sure, but he has his father's determination.

Lastly, his greatest trait by far, was that he would love unconditionally, as I always have, and as his grandmother and grandfather always had. He would wear his heart on his sleeve and be

open and honest. He would inevitably get hurt because of it. He would forget love exists for a while, thinking people are only out to use him, and might even turn to alcohol as his father did. But this wouldn't last for longer than a few years because he'd know in his heart that drinking won't ease the pain, it'll just numb it. And as with all painkillers, when the drug leaves the system, all that's left is an empty feeling and a pain worse than before.

I had this all planned out the moment I knew I was having a baby boy. Granted, I also knew one day he would get too old for his mom and leave me. It wouldn't be a sad goodbye because he was just going to a college a few hours away, but the idea of my baby not living at home by my side would destroy me. I would cry for the first few weeks and call him every day. He would get annoyed and start making excuses as to why he couldn't answer the phone, but I would know he is hurting too, he is just too stubborn to admit to his mother he misses me.

Eventually, many years down the road, I would be sick, and he would need to take care of me. I would constantly insist on being independent, but he would shush me and make me take my pills. His wife would also help, and the grandkids too, and life would be perfect. I would die happy and with a smile on my face, spending my last few moments with the perfect son, and his equally perfect family. I would tell him how proud I am of him, and he would just smile because he isn't allowed to refute any of the compliments I give him.

He would deliver a great speech at my funeral and be strong for everyone else in the family. He would go around and ask all the friends close to us if they were okay, and if they needed anything. He would tear himself apart before he let anyone cry for me, but if they did cry, he would be the shoulder they could cry on. Secretly though, in the comfort of his own home and with his wife, he would silently cry for me and regret the years in college when he wouldn't answer my call. I would naturally forgive him, as I too had done the same thing in college.

All these thought-out plans were blown away by the same breeze blowing around the leaves on this perfect autumn day. Of course, Death would pick the perfect day to take away the perfect son, as nothing else

would have been acceptable. It's almost as if He's apologizing, that He understands how much pain this would cause me, but has to take my son away despite all of it. I don't argue, I just silently ask Death to watch over my son, as I failed to do in my life.

It has only been a few hours, but my husband is already passed out drunk in his study. It surprises me to see him this way; he'd been clean for ten years. "Special occasion" is the excuse he'll most likely use. I put a blanket around him and plant a kiss on his forehead before continuing my journey through a now very empty house.

I keep walking and end up in my son's room. I lay in his now forever-empty bed, smelling the sheets and trying to remember all the plans I had made when I learned of my pregnancy and when he was born. In the moment I first held him, I didn't think there was any way I could love someone as much as I loved him. I loved him so much it hurt, and I promised I would be by his side should he ever need me. I told him there was nothing in the world he could do that would take my love away, then he started crying for the first time right there in my arms.

Even now, as I stare at his posters and trophies, laying on his sheets and smelling his terrible cologne, I love him just as much as I did when I first saw him. True love, it would seem, is not something found between strangers who met at a bar one day after hours. True love is not what fairy tales make it out to be. It's not a feeling that takes over two people entirely and they must be together because of fate. True love is a parent's love for their child, and is only realized after one or the other is gone forever.

***Zachary Bigelow** is a biology major here on campus, one of the few not going into the medical program. He works on DNA sequencing for voles in the lab, and in his free time loves to write fiction and play video games. He hopes to one day publish some of the books he has written, and make a difference in the world using the knowledge gained from biology research.*