

The Unwilling Father

Geoffrey's quietness unsettles me as his fingers follow the patterns on his bedroom quilt. Occasionally he pulls a thread and twirls it around his fingers in an obvious gesture of avoiding eye contact with me. My uneasiness, although brief, comes from seeing him standing there just 48 hours ago accusing me of being a whore when he learned the truth about his biological father. I show him pictures of him, a mirror image of himself with his red hair, thin lips, and bushy eyebrows. He smiles. "Tommy was a recovering addict when I met him." He brushes the tears away, looks down at his arm, and touches the veins where he mainlined. Scars are now hidden by May 30, 2010, a tattoo reminding him of the day he chose life.

"I'm like my father."

I can't deny it. I tell him the truth.

"Geoffrey, I loved Tommy."

Geoffrey looks up at me and then returns to twisting the thread on his bedspread.

"I feared him more."

I wait for his reaction. He stops fidgeting with the bedspread. I must tell him the truth about his father's history with drugs and criminal activity, so I open the book of memory and tell him the story, one page at a time. Knowing he has an Italian heritage excites him. He loves Italian girls, Italian food, and Italian wine. Perfect. It all suddenly makes sense. Everyone in the family craves roulade, bratwurst and German potato salad and all he wants is a bowl of pasta with meatballs.

When I tell him I located his biological father, he hugs me and thanks me because he knows it is taking away my control, which is something I have desperately needed since I became pregnant for him. Loving him means trusting God to watch over him and protecting him

from the fears I let torment me for years. I tell him Tommy's wife did not respond back to the letters his sister, Melinda, and I sent. I suggest he make the next attempt. He does and with success.

Geoffrey finally has his first phone call with his father. He learns more about Tommy than I ever did in the time we were together. The bonds they are building are undeniable. As I glance through the sliding glass doors, I see Geoffrey on the deck talking to his biological father. His smile takes away all of my fears. Geoffrey is happy. I did the right thing. Knowing Tommy's background and life story helps him to understand himself. He understands his idiosyncrasies because Tommy shares the same crazy traits. He understands why he looks and feels different from his siblings. He understands the distance he feels with the man who raised him. Most importantly, he finds what he has been looking for all along. He finds someone who will accept him not only because he is his child, but because of the understanding they share about life and the choices they each made in the past.

Tommy urges him to go to meetings for his recovery, and Geoffrey listens. They make plans to meet each other and then suddenly, everything stops. Geoffrey doesn't hear from him again. Nothing.

His wife says he can't handle having a son. It's too much for him. What does he do? He goes back on drugs. He squanders his life's savings because he can't handle the responsibility of being a father, not once, but twice.

Two years later, Geoffrey sees the light. He has a father who tucked him into bed at night when he was a child and who walked up and down the sidelines at his football games. He has a father who cried when the son he loved more than anything found out about his biological father.

He fears the loss of the son he loves. Geoffrey learns he has more than a father. He has a loving dad.

When secrets are exposed the truth is allowed to breathe.