

New Beginnings

By: Erica Graham

Ben softly opened the door. Dust drifted from the door frame and landed gently on his head as he entered the room. He wanted to breathe, but his body was still. As he looked around, he saw everything in its rightful place, untouched. After gathering his courage, he inhaled deeply. The room still smelled like her. He slowly walked over to the bed and allowed his body to sink into the soft, cool mattress. Looking over at the bedside table, Ben saw multiple frames with pictures from the past. In the center was a photo with 5 people on a beach. Ben's parents, his two sisters, and Ben himself stood smiling back at him through the dusty glass. Ben closed his eyes and allowed his other senses to take over. He welcomed the familiar feeling of the worn bedspread and the sound of soft snowflakes striking the window pane. While his mind was filled with warm memories, his heart was overcome with a dull ache.

"Are you okay?"

Ben quickly shot up off the bed as he was startled by the unexpected voice. Megan was standing silently in the door way.

"I am sorry...I just...I thought you might like some company."

Ben subtly nodded his head. Megan moved to the bed and gently took a seat next to her brother.

The still silence was eventually interrupted by Megan's voice. "It looks just the way I remember it. I haven't been in here since that day. Many times I walked past this room and reached for the handle, but my reach always seemed to come up short. What about you?" Her gaze shifted to Ben.

"No," Ben choked, followed by silence before he gathered the courage to continue. "I was on my way downstairs and something felt different today. I had to see it. I had to say goodbye one last time. I still find myself waking up, expecting things to be the way they used to. Every morning I relive the memory of learning my life will never be the same. The memory of learning someone I thought would always be there for me was gone forever."

"Me too...after all this time, it just doesn't seem real." Megan wrapped her arm around Ben's shoulders. She could feel her little brother shake as grief filled his body.

"How do you do it?" Ben asked between tears. "How do you say goodbye? How do you move on when all you want is to go back?"

“I don’t. I have tried to forget. I have tried to remember. I have learned that the worst thing I can do is move on without remembering. I found that those memories are not meant to be forgotten. They have shaped me and are meant shape you, Ben, into who you are and remind you that every day is worth living, every day is important.”

“My heart aches. My mind is tired. I don’t think I am strong enough for this.”

“Ben, nobody is strong enough for this. It is not about strength. It is about finding the courage to take each step while learning to live again.”

“It hit me this morning. This is the first Christmas, you know...since we last said goodbye. The thought of going down those stairs and trying to put on a smile while I open gifts makes my stomach turn. I am tired of putting on an act for mom and dad.”

“Then don’t. Look at me Ben, mom and dad don’t need you to put on an act. We have all suffered a terrible loss. Mom and dad did not know, but I heard them talking the other day. They are worried about you. We have already lost one sibling in this family, but they feel like we are losing you too. They just need you, the way you are. They want to be there for you. They want to feel your hurts and your struggles. Our family is broken. Our family is hurting. The best way to heal is allowing yourself to hurt together.”

Ben’s words choked in his throat and his eyes were overcome with tears as he wrapped his arms around Megan. “I am trying. I want to move on, but it is so hard. It’s not that I CAN’T let go of the past. It’s that I don’t WANT to. I worry that if I do, I am giving up all hope. I don’t want to give up that hope.”

Megan gently took hold of Ben’s shoulders and moved him away from her waist to stare into his eyes. “Ben, don’t let go of the memories. Don’t let go of the hope that you will ever be happy again. But do let go of your regrets.” Megan grabbed Ben’s hands. “You don’t need to let go of everything, but sometimes we have to let go of the things that are holding us back from moving on.” Megan stood up, still holding Ben’s hands and helped him to his feet.

“It’s Christmas morning, Ben. No, it will never be the same again. But take with you those memories and build new memories that fill your heart with excitement.” Megan gently walked with Ben toward the door. “I love you Ben and am always here.”

Megan slowly removed her hands as Ben stepped into the hallway. “It is time to let go.”

“I know,” his voice echoed.

Ben turned back to peer into the empty room. “Thank you, Megan.”