

I Took My Dad To A Phillies Game by Brooke Elwell

I won two tickets to the Phillies game over the radio the other day. We live just over the bridge, maybe thirty minutes out on an average day, and I remember thinking I didn't care much about sports or the game, but there was someone important that hadn't been to a game in decades.

It was the first time I'd seen him almost cry. He was an immigration lawyer with the patience of a saint, the worldliness of a diplomat, and an affinity for fine wine and liquor, teaching me to speak Hindi and Arabic and giving me my first map of the world. He was an Ivy League alumni who taught his little white girl the cultures of the globe, bringing home homemade meals from his clients as they expressed their thanks after gaining American citizenship.

He'd taken me to my first concert. Though my mother never approved of concerts much, my father had an absurd fixation with rock music, so we saw KISS together at the Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia, our faces painted like Gene Simmons, the time we spent together almost too good to be true.

But we'd never been to a Phillies game together, despite him watching them play on TV each night and already having drawers upon drawers full of Phillies merchandise, including hats from the 2008 World Series and vintage Ryan Howard jerseys from 2004.

He'd given me his gray Honda SUV for my seventeenth birthday, so I decided I would treat him and drive us into the city. It wasn't often girls were lucky enough to have a father like mine, one who could have fun but take care of me and share the responsibility of raising two children with my mother.

As we walked into Citizens Bank Park with our ticket stubs, I tried to leash my beaming smile, but I couldn't. Having my father by my side mutated my general contentment to elation, as if it was Christmas morning and the gift I'd been asking for for years was finally given to me.

We got situated; our seats weren't anything special, but any seat gave a good view of the game. I got up and got him a hot dog and water, my heart beating faster and faster as I came closer to spending one more night with my father.

It was a seemingly heartwarming scene, father and daughter sitting happily together. "Harper's making the Blue Jays wish they stayed in Toronto," I remarked with an almost childish grin.

"Sure is," he mused.

I smiled.

But then, he leaned back in his chair, a shadow replacing the warmth. The man turned into a blank canvas, and neither of us were equipped with the paint to remake what had been there just a moment before.

His water that I bought him turned to ale, which he drank as if the game in front of him and his daughter beside him were the most insufferable things in the world, and only the golden ichor of alcohol could soothe the ache I had created.

I thought to myself, *I've been here before. I've seen this before, seen this too many times.*

He regarded me with sheer apathy, as if I wasn't even there, as if he didn't care about me or the game but was preoccupied with the beer in his hand and the invisible war in his head.

Maybe it was something I had done. Maybe the work he did took a toll on him, maybe he kept doing it to support the family, maybe it made him resent me, resent today. Maybe the only way he could withstand the burden of his family was to drink each day away until there was nothing left of him.

I took one last look at him before unsuspectingly turning my head, stopping tears that welled. He'd looked sad, like a shell of a human being, and nothing like the father I had wanted to bring with me.

A few minutes had passed when the section we were seated in roared with cheers and applause. I raised my head to celebrate with my father, but he was gone.

I sat shell-shocked for a brief moment before rising to my feet. I took off in search of him, a pit of turmoil erupting in my stomach. Perhaps the war in his head had found its way to my abdomen. Perhaps he was at peace now.

I would fight his battle if only I could find him. I ran laps around the circular stadium, calling his name and fighting the urge to scream. The hole in my stomach was expanding, and it was only a matter of time before it consumed me whole.

I found a security guard; he took me to the man who had scanned our tickets. I asked him to call for my father's ticket stub, and he eyed me warily. "Seat 3 Row 23?" he asked. "No one's bought that ticket for this game, miss. Sorry."

I felt my hands shake with grief and desperation. The soldiers began to climb the ropes of my insides, defiantly fighting to be freed. Where had he gone? Not the man I'd seen last; I didn't care about him anymore. Where was the father I had wanted?

I struggled to stand, my knees threatening to give out, as if I was responsible for holding the weight of the world.

But, like Atlas, I stood, refusing to feed the part of my past that threatened to block my attempt at a peaceful future.

It's not real, I reminded myself. It will never be real.

I fought those fictitious, wishful memories of a false person from my mind, reminding myself that the man I had brought with me was nothing but a song of hope, a dream I couldn't shake from my waking state, a plea for peace from the battlefield of girls like me who didn't have a dad worthy of taking to a game.