

Stand by Me

by Rosena Petit Homme

I open my eyes and slowly close them, Allowing the darkness to submerge me in the brief moment of bliss. Away from the reality of my world and the news I just received. If only blinking took longer than a millisecond so I had enough time to reflect on this newly found information. Cancer is such a negative noun. It is usually correlated with an unavoidable painful death, something no one would ever want to experience. Though in my father's case he only had curable prostate cancer.

As Haitians, My family prioritized health. My parents made sure to keep us as fit as possible to ensure a happy life. That meant always attending doctor appointments, Morning stretches, herbal teas, and daily prayers. So many prayers. Anything that could be done to keep us healthy and alive. This news was like hearing that our methods had failed us. Our prayers were not heard and now we have to face the music.

"Mwen pa vle fè operasyon an. (I don't want to do the surgery.)" my father says. "What do you mean you don't want to do the surgery?" I question.

"Se desizyon mwen, Rosena. Sispann. (It's my decision, Rosena. Enough.)" He says assertively, straightening his shoulders and Walking away. I turn around, ready to follow



him into the next room but I'm stopped by a hand grabbing mine. I turned around to see that it was my mom who was preventing me from following my father.

“Li pè cheri. Li pa konnen kisa Operasyon an pral fè li. Pou kò li. (He's scared honey. He doesn't know what the Surgery will do to him. To his body.)”

“Li tande kèk moun ap pale. Li pè pou li mwens gason. (He heard some people talking. He's scared of being less of a man. Afraid of what he'll lose with this prostate cancer. Afraid of telling people and having them think differently of him. He doesn't want to lose that. Losing that is like dying to him which is worse than letting this cancer take over.)”

"Rosena, mwen bezwen di ou yon bagay. Yon bagay sou kansè an. ("Rosena, I need to tell you something. Something about the Cancer.)" my father says several days later.

“mwen te toujou konnen. (I've always known.)” He looks down at his hands as if he's purposefully avoiding my eyes. “Papa m te genye l. Mwen te konnen li tap vini pou mwen. (My dad had this. I knew it was coming to get me next.)”

My Father continues, “I grew up in a small village and my dad did everything. If someone in the village needed help, he was the one to ask. He always gave. He was a giver. But he never took.

“Never took any help that could be given to someone else. Never took any criticism and feedback even when he probably should've. He was strong but he was stubborn. So stubborn.” He says. He stops and glances up at me after what feels like an eternity.

“Maybe that's why I never knew about his illness. Maybe that's why he refused to tell me anything until the point where he couldn't hide it anymore. My father died at 55. He died the moment we needed him the most. The moment when we should've been the ones he needed for a chance. All his illnesses caught up to him and he couldn't keep himself up anymore.

“Burying my father was the hardest thing I had to do. I didn't know about the cancer until my mother told me just a few days later. All I could think about was if maybe I had known, maybe I could've prevented it. Maybe I could've helped him.” He bows his wrinkled face as silence fills the room. The silence felt thick and for a second, I thought it would suffocate me.

I see my father. I hear the weakness in his voice—the pain and fear of what is to come. I've never met my grandfather but hearing my dad speak, We were transformed Into Haiti. We're standing side by side and I can see his father working on his farm. I can feel the heat from the sun beating against our skin, the dry air brushing against our faces. I can see his weak body hunched over yet still working hard

since he doesn't have a choice. I can see him collapse from exhaustion and not getting up.

"Why have you never told us this?" I say looking up at him. In his eyes, I can see his fear. I could see his worry, his motivations, His hopes, and dreams and I knew I was in the wrong. I'm sinking into a hole and there's no way out. Who am I to feel the way I feel? Maybe his hole is 10 times bigger. Maybe his hole is completely covered and he's suffocating. I reach over and hug him. I've lived with him my entire life and I never realized how small he has gotten, how his thin, boney legs press into mine.

"It's ok," I whisper. "Thank you, Papa." He nods in response, a small smile emerging on his face. Maybe he didn't mean it and maybe he was still afraid of the thought but all I could think about was how he gave me a chance. He allowed me into his world and shared his fears and I knew I couldn't let him down.

After that moment, He eventually agreed to get his tumor removed. Maybe my persistence did help or maybe he decided all on his own. Maybe after getting everything off this chest, it allowed him to finally breathe. Being stuck in that hole was probably suffocating, as he slowly slipped in further the longer he carried his secrets and fears. I'm happy that he finally accepted our help and got out. Maybe he didn't want to share the heavy load, in fear of it only making us slip into our own hole, but ever since the

moment he opened up, I've noticed how much happier he's gotten.

As I sit across from him in the hospital room, I notice the gleam in his eyes as he stares at my younger brothers. The wrinkles that used to sit on his face are nearly nonexistent and his hair has grown a couple of shades darker.

My father who always felt as though he was the last priority in our family is truly at the center. His pain was our pain and his story was ours as well. But no story truly ends and there will be more obstacles to overcome. Hopefully, this time we'll go through them together so that no one has to hold their pains to the point of collapsing from exhaustion. Hopefully, this time he won't feel as though he has to experience it alone.