

2014 May 3rd Tue

At first, Natalie had almost ignored it. She knew that she was here to arrange boxes for her new house, not looking for heartfelt memories that she had weaved together with her family. She placed the old weathered box on top of another, but as she turned to repeat the process, her eyes darted to the photograph once more. The image seemed to hum with a melody of its own. It was a blurry image of a happy family standing in front of a heavenly landscape with fields of green stretching endlessly behind them. A blue bicycle lay on a boy's feet with a bent front wheel while behind him, a woman with warm, hazel eyes had a smile brighter than sunlight piercing through a dark room. Her arm was around a man in a black suit with a serious expression, yet his eyes seemed to have the slightest hint of joy. In front of him, his hands lay on the shoulders of a small girl with hair that matched her mother's, her pink dress frilled at the ends like blueprints. Natalie squinted. The girl in the picture looked oddly familiar - like it was someone she knew. Her memory suddenly snapped at her... it looked like herself, when she was younger. Not similar, but identical. She had the same pink bow on her hair that Natalie had, while her dimples looked the same when she smiled. But something within her knew that it wasn't her. It was impossible. This looked like this was an image in the 1990's, when she was about two years old. She stared at the photo again, observing the bottom of the paper.

'May 4th 1990 Wed, - Dad did an exam for his work and passed!' it read, the letters wobbly and messy like it was scribbled by a five year old. The words echoed through the air, the photograph slipping out of her hands, flipping like coins in the air waiting to land on the table of tomorrow.

May 4th 1990, Wed

I sat cross-legged on the soft emerald grass, waiting to prepare the photo that would be framed on our wall tomorrow in the morning. "Hurry up, Mum!" Natalie cried, her young innocent eyes eager for me. "Okay, okay, Nat, calm down. I'll be there soon. Just wait for me to adjust the angle so we get a perfect shot. Why don't you play with your brother Jake while you're waiting? Ask him for a ride on his bike, and he'll surely let you."

"Okay, Mum! Just be quick then!" Galloping away at full speed, I watched Jake teach her how to ride a 2-wheeled bike. I smiled, 'If only this moment could last forever...' I thought. By the time Natalie and Jake had turned back at me, I had finished adjusting the angle and preparing everything for our family photo. When I opened my mouth to tell them I was ready, moments of joy turned to horror. Arthur bolted towards them, dropping his expensive suitcase we had bought together. I looked forward. No... Jake...Natalie... They were riding together at an uncontrollable speed towards the deepest lake in the state. This can't be happening... they don't even know how to swim... What am I doing here? Shouldn't a real parent be sprinting towards them? Seconds later, I ran towards them. Desperate, with a tiny ray of hope. But when I got there, the first thing I saw was my husband Arthur sighing with a tear rolling down from his face. I had never seen him cry before...he was always serious, talking about work non stop on the breakfast table, never even mentioning our kids' names. But behind this mask, now I saw what a devoted parent he was. "Elisa," he whispered. "Elisa, Elisa, Elisa..." I put my hands to my mouth, bullets of sweat still trickling down my forehead. I couldn't bare to look at the lake, the floating images of my children drowning, or the pale hand of Jake reaching out of the water for help. But I knew we both couldn't swim. We would both drown ourselves. "I'm sorry I couldn't get our children in time." I opened my mouth to say something, but the words wouldn't budge. I knew things would be over - the memories we made with our children and the happiness that was formed between everyone in our family. But with both of the children gone, everything would collapse. I covered my face with my sweaty hands, but when I removed them, Arthur was gone. And the only thing near me was a splash. "No," I whispered. "ARTHUR!" I screamed, my breath catching between

my heart and my throat. I fell on the floor, and a glassy sapphire orb rolled down my eyelid. Would I have to continue my life alone now? Without any of my beloved family members? I knew for a fact that the light in my life had disappeared. The darkness I had experienced when I was a child would return once more. I picked up the camera that we had all bought together with our money combined - Jake's, Natalie's, Arthur's and mine, but now this was the only thing that would be a memory of our family. When I turned to gather our crimson checked picnic mat, something strange rang like a bell in my ears. I looked behind me, to the lake. And I spotted a moving figure - pink, black and blue all squashed together.

I dropped everything and rushed to the very edge of the lake as fast as my legs could carry me. "Jake! Natalie! ARTHUR!" I screamed

until my lungs and my throat started to hurt. Then Arthur's head popped out, and his eyes were closed. A moment of horror

approached me again, but I heard a voice, quiet yet so loud to my ears. "Elisa..." I pulled his arm with all the strength I had. I didn't care if my arm hurt, or his did, as long as we were one big happy family again. After coughing out water they had swallowed, I asked, "Are you okay, everyone? Arthur, how did you rescue them? Jake, you pigeon, how did you even end up in the lake with Natalie? And Natalie... I'm sorry. I promise I will hurry up next time when taking a photo," I laughed, bursting into tears again. "Why are you crying, Mum?" asked Natalie with a confused expression. "Shouldn't you be happy if we're safe?" asked Jake. "I suppose so," I laughed again, wiping the tears off my face. "Let's all dry our clothes in the sun so we can take a final photo together," suggested Arthur, sharing his idea in front of us for the first time in years. When we took the photo, we returned home, and gazed up at the photo we had framed on our wall. When I left to cook dinner, I could hear the sound of the laughs and sadness echoing from the photo, like a melody pleasant yet sophisticated.

2 Decades and 2 Summers later, September 5th 2012

I gaze up at the photo again. My darling Natalie's hair glimmers like sunlight on water, each strand a shiny diamond representing the memories of us together. As I look closely at my lovely Jake, he returns my smile, yet his one looks younger, brighter and less melancholy than I am. I hope they're healthy and well now. The never-reaching tomorrow that never happened doesn't feel too distant now. When I used to think that today's tomorrow would never happen, I guess I was wrong. Now, I realize we don't create memories using photographs to remember life - we remind memories to remember our lives. And with that, I finally rest in peace, hoping that my children will live their years beautifully. Goodbye, my dear Jake and Natalie... I must go now. I hope you enjoy your lives like I did and remember the best times that were created in your lives.