

Message to Girl Riding on Her Dad's Shoulders

There will be a moment a few years from now when you are disappointed by something your father says. Maybe it will be a look, or the way he hesitates when you ask him if he likes your new boyfriend. Maybe it will be the feeling you have that you have let him down but he won't tell you how. Maybe it will be the way he thinks he can tell you what to do long after you have left home. There is no way to tell what it will be, except that it will be something.

One day, you will find yourself sitting next to his bed holding his hand in the hospital room where he is spending his last days. This man that you are visiting isn't your father, not the one that lives in your heart. This man is a stranger preparing for a journey you can not take with him. These feelings you are having about losing him are hard and complicated and layered like the deep creases that have settled onto his fierce face. You might forget this day but I want you to remember it.

He carried you on his shoulders during an ice storm on Valentine's Day in 2007 up a long and slippery hill. He had no gloves or boots, but when he needed to, he stepped in ankle deep puddles of icy cold water and kept going. He held your calves against his chest and walked as steadily as he could against rough terrain. You slipped back and he grabbed you and pulled you back up on his broad shoulders. You rested your chin on the top of his head and stuck your hands inside the striped muffler that didn't match his tattered check jacket.

He has saved his best for you. Your coat is new, your boots are dry and your view is from above. He is carrying you home, as far away as it might be, as cold as it is, and as dark as it is becoming. He has lifted you up on his shoulders and will take you as far as he can as long as he is able.

That day on the hill, in the ice storm on Valentine's day, you held on and let him take you. I know this because I was behind you. I know this because I was there.