

Father is found

I had never seen my father cry, until the night my mother died. The image of that unshakeable man reduced to tears is a sight I will never forget. I remember sitting up in my bed and listening to the snuffles and moans that floated up the hallway. I slipped from my bed and padded quietly down the hall to my parent's room. The door was ajar, and a slice of golden light fell on the floor. I stopped outside, hidden in the shadows, and listened intently. I could hear my father murmuring her name over and over 'Delaya, Delaya, Delaya...' I put my eye to the crack in the doorway. Lying on the bed in calm repose was my mother; her eyes closed, her face calm. The figure of my father crouched over her was in stark contrast. His face was red and distorted with grief, his tears soaked the front of his nightshirt. I had never imagined he could be so vulnerable, and that disturbed me more than the knowledge that my mother was dead. She had been sick for many months, and although I was only nine years old and did not understand what was wrong with her, I soon realized that I would have to make my own way when she was gone. My memory of the months following my mother's departure to the next life are a vague blur. I remember some incidents as though they happened recently, and some as if from a nightmare. However, recent conversations with friends and family who were around at the time have helped to clarify some events that, in my unreliable child's memory, seemed strange and without explanation. My father remarried not two months after my mother's funeral. This event I found the most confusing and disturbing. I could not reconcile the image of my unshakeable father holding my mother's hand and weeping uncontrollably over her body, with the sight of his new bride crossing the threshold into our family home. I remember her as a sly, obnoxious creature who refused to speak to Caelan and me, and would not sleep on the same floor of the house that my mother had died on. I was glad that she did not speak to me, and made every effort to make her new life in our home as unpleasant as possible. Caelan, in contrast, was absorbed with her from first sight, and clung to her skirts and called her 'mama' just as he had done to our mother not six months ago. She resisted him at first, then, realising she could use him to gain favour with our extended family, began coddling him with all manner of selfish delights. I on the other hand withdrew, feeling betrayed on all sides.

"Tierra my dear, you have always been my favourite niece. You are so grown up now, with your hair tied back and your sleeves long. I remember you as a little girl running around your father's estate. It's a pity that your mother died so young, she would be so proud of the woman that you have become. Sit down child, don't hover in the doorway so! Are you timid in

my presence because I am so frail? A conversation will not break the great Lucina de Rouen my dear, I can tell you that.

My dear, I have summoned you here because I have a story that must be told, and you are the one who must hear it. But this is a confidential family matter, and must never be reproduced verbally or in writing, do you understand? Good girl. Now, to begin. When your father was a young man he was betrothed to a young woman from a good family. Her name was Gisella, and she was a pretty thing but inclined to cruelty. Your father rebelled to the betrothal and refused to do it, partly because he didn't love her, and partly because he enjoyed his freedom. Our father flew into a rage and threatened to cut him off from the family, a terrible threat in those days. At that, your father gave in. The engagement was announced and the date for the wedding set for a year's time, as was the custom back then. Your father resigned himself to his fate and dutifully met with his bride and her family, who were delighted that their daughter was engaged to a de Rouen.

But things did not proceed as planned. It was during that time that young Wren met and fell in love with your mother, Delaya Sansen. She was the daughter of a diplomat staying in the city, and was of a lower class than the de Rouen's. But your father did not see that: he loved her from the moment they met, eight months before he was due to be married, and it was not long before they became fully-fledged lovers.

At this point your father was in a terrible position. He was betrothed to marry Gisella, whom he did not love, and was unable to marry Delaya, whom he would have died for. Breaking off the engagement at that point would have been very damaging to the whole family. Your mother and father spent months trying to find a way out of their predicament which would cause the least amount of damage. But as the date for the wedding grew closer, they were at a loss for a solution. In the end they went to a priest for help, and he was sympathetic to their plight. He married them, then and there, with two nuns and a novice as witnesses; and gave them enough money to escape to the country and start a life there. But Gisella's family were outraged. They hunted your father and mother like hounds until they found them. Upon hearing that they were married they flew into a collective rage and demanded that they both be jailed for fraud. But by then your parents had learnt that your mother was ill and would not live much longer. So your father called a meeting with Gisella's family, and explained to them that his young wife would not live much longer. It was decided that when your mother died your father would immediately marry Gisella, as he had promised over a year ago. Unbeknownst to everyone at the time, your mother was destined to live for another decade and bore two children. But the sickness was always inside her, and it

eventually claimed her life. Your father did his best to keep the news from reaching Gisella and her family, but they soon found out. And as he had promised many years earlier, your father married the woman he did not love."

I had never seen my father cry, until the night my mother died. The image of that unshakeable man reduced to total devastation is a sight I will never forget. Over thirty years have passed since the night I slipped from my bed and crept to my parents' room to find that my mother had died in the night. I now know that on that night my father was grieving not only for the life that he and his wife had, but for the future, which he knew would contain no trace of her.

The day that my Aunt Lucina told me my parents' story is the day that I forgave my father for remarrying. I realise that he had little power in the situation, and although he seemed distant and sad at times, he still cherished my brother and me greatly until the day he died and rejoined my mother.