

Liftoff

by Dominic Sventor

Within the darkness lies a stream of pain. That darkness fades away.

Faint, golden rays and blissful winds waltz through the bedroom's translucent curtains, which flow like ghosts.

My gaze never leaves this portrait on my nightstand: my wife, Jason, and I in a happy hug in front of an orange sunrise. Her eyes share the colors and the designs of the wondrous Milky Way.

Light winds kiss against my clammy face. Thin air comes into contact with my dry eyes, which stings like acid mist. A loop of silence so strong that I could hear the birds hop around in their nests from beyond the ajar window.

I pull the covers off of me and sit up. My chalky eyes stare at the note in blue crayon next to the portrait.

The door creaks as Jason pokes his head inside—a look of concern on his face.

“Hey. What got you up so early?” I ask.

Jason steps into the room. He wears his favorite pajamas—astronauts and various dark planets scatter all over it. He holds a blue crayon in his hand as he walks up to me.

“Morning. I was wondering if you want to write the note with me today, Dad?”

My body shivers.

“Jason, I don’t know.”

“But you promised! Mom needs this message.”

The sting returns to my eyes.

“Jason, I’m sorry. I can’t...” The words feel heavy as they leave my mouth.

The glossiness in Jason’s eyes spreads before his head drops. He snuffles and shuffles towards the door.

The clack of the door rings and repeats itself over and over inside my head like a broken record. The sound of rejection—the sound of disconnection—the sound of abandonment.

My hand trembles out to the note. I observe my son’s handwriting in blue crayon: “To Mom.” My head falls in surrender, and my eyes return to the stream of pain. I cough out a painful whimper.

I find myself lost in the white space of the ceiling. My mind races to find the words to say. My ears ring with that door clack. Each clack feels like a strike to my heart. My body shivers as my blood turns frigid.

I hear a loud thump from the closet.

I push myself off the bed and head over. I open the door and flick the switch.

A box lies on the floor. Newspapers litter the rug.

I gather the papers, stack them together, and put them in the box. I catch a glance at the front page.

My son has always called her a hero. Instead of a cape, she dons that shiny helmet.

My eyes swell up. A tear bleeds out and drops, which melts a section of the paper's black text. I squeeze the papers under my fingers.

"It wasn't your time...."

My eyes stop at a chunk of words under her picture.

"The sky's the limit, but that limit cannot be reached without guidance. My husband, Dillan—he's that guidance. His love and compassion have made many others find themselves and initiate a liftoff in their lives. He and Jason are stars that I will always cherish in my heart. I love them both to the moon and back."

I stare at that text before my head turns to the note.

I open Jason's bedroom door. My slippers brush against his rug. Among a bed and a drawing-table resides a dark painting of the Milky Way galaxy, which covers his whole wall.

He lays in bed with his back towards me. I can hear faint sniffles.

His head turns when he hears a whip of paper and the roll of a soft crayon.

I sit down near the drawing-table and glance at him with a weak smile.

"We're going to write it?" Jason asks with surprise. He hops off his bed and sits on another chair next to me. He smiles ear-to-ear.

"Yup, today's the day."

Jason picks up the crayon and directs it below the two blue words.

"What do you wanna say to Mom, Dad?"

My whole body freezes up.

"Me?"

"Yeah! Don't you want to say something to Mom?"

I look to my son who bears a stretchy grin. He slides the note to me and rolls the crayon over.

I stare down at the white page. I then glance up at the beautiful colors on Jason's wall.

I pick up the crayon and write.

"I miss you dearly. Not a day goes by without you in our hearts. Even though you're now among the stars, you've left me with a priceless gift, and I swear to protect him—always. We both love you to the moon and back—forever and beyond." I nod.

"Okay. Your turn, Jason." I sniffle with a smile, as I slide the note towards him.

Jason and I walk out onto the front porch. The smell of petunias and snapdragons fills the air amongst the taste of pure winds. The light beams down from beyond the powdery-white clouds, which creates a warmth around the porch.

I slide the note inside the blue balloon and exhale into it.

"Don't pop it, Dad!"

I chuckle in-between blows as I shake my head. "I won't." When the balloon expands, I tie it up with string and hand it to Jason.

"Ready?" I ask.

"Yeah!" His expression jets with happiness.

I wrap my hands around him like a bear and hoist him up on my shoulders. The balloon sways in his hand.

"3... 2...—"

"—1!" We both say in unison—enthusiasm in our voice.

The string slides from Jason's grip and floats away.

“We have liftoff!” I say to the world, as the pain leaves, as well.

Our eyes stare in astonishment as the balloon soars among the blue sky and golden rays.

My son watches as the balloon disappears into the clouds before he hugs me. I pat his legs. The light from beyond the Heavens grows stronger, and it enwraps us both in a hug of warmth—a hug of unison—a hug of reconnection.

END