

Fool's Gold

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Dreams are combinations of the best and worst in us. I often visited my father's business den to understand what his dreams were. Above a mahogany desk was an elaborate collage he had commissioned at our first home. One of New York's finest artists put the work's first pieces together; she personally glued up images of his best accomplishments as his wealth expanded. I remember it at a fraction of its current size. We were living in our apartment in the Bronx when it only had an image of an economy car and a single-story house. Kids were never a part of his picture. I was only four when I noticed.

The clippings for Dad's creation started when my mother left us for a banker. The absence of her beauty by his side left him heartbroken. His original dreams grew from a corkboard. There were no women on his beloved artwork after the divorce, just a simple car and house. The last time I saw her was her staring through the rearview mirror of our panel-boarded van. She gave me a blank stare after dropping me off at school.

Grandma noticed the absence of the female kind before I did. That's what she said after I asked her about it. I caught her taping a cutout of Chef Julia Andre over his dream sports car. Gram came to help us at first. That was before she and dad fought about his spending time with me.

I was in the sixth grade by then, the final year before boarding school. A picture of Senate Bank's Tower was secured over Gram's head on the collage. It was time to move to Rhode Island. When we prayed together, Dad prayed for success. When I slept, Dad stayed awake. And, when I ate, I ate alone.

Dad claimed this built character. He said the same thing when he sent me to boarding school.

When I turned seventeen, we moved to an upscale place in the glass and steel prison called Manhattan. This time Dad let me add my dream car. Like a cruel joke, I discovered the electric sports car would be his. There was the beach house, Ocean Runner, and Tiffany chandeliers. All of them joined his masterpiece above his desk.

July 31st, 1983, was a date he had painted in lavender. Dad wouldn't like it if I knew this, but he wrote Mom a birthday card every year. With a little detective work during my summer breaks, I narrowed down the day of her birth between July and August. The last day of July must have been it. Nothing else was related to that date. He would try hiding the cards in the middle of the letters he sent with me to take to the Post Office, but I already knew what he wrote inside. He updated mom on his promotion at Smith & Blackburn's as their CFO. Big promotions were a worthy enough cause to write. Inevitably, sending Mom this letter meant that dad would

be staying at the office for at least two weeks. This is how the pattern of madness worked.

This last time at the end of his absence, he asked me to bring new suits to his office from Niemen Markus. The manager there was always ready for me. I could find the thick credit card in the top drawer of his dresser.

I loved the thrilling rush upward in the tall and shiny elevator at Dad's latest place of work. That was before the dive in seeing him unkempt. The elevator doors chimed when opening, and it felt like my heart stayed on the first floor, how I wished to go back down after seeing him like this. He was staring out the window of his corner office. I wanted to give him the news he wanted, the news that would complete his life's artwork.

"Leave it on the couch," Dad would say, but this time he stood differently, those sunken black eyes focused upward at the tower across the street, the coldness in his voice complete. It was apparent he had stood there for some time.

Another letter she didn't respond to.

At home, I felt warm droplets fall down my cheeks. Mother had her new man, a wealthy man, and father had prestige, money, and his masterpiece. I glared at the collage as the artist added a golden Chrysler building to the top. It was the empty space Dad purposefully left for the thing he truly wanted.

"Fool's gold," I recalled Grandma saying about his yearly fits. "Real Gold is in the flecks of light in your eyes. Your father would know that if he looked at you for more than a second."

I stood in for myself and dad at Grandma's funeral. She died of a virus that claimed old folks that smoked like her. Like an old peach, she shriveled up thin, and her wrinkles had grown thick. Her eye sockets looked like they were carved by blueberries. I buried her just before my last year at Grey Waters Boarding School. I borrowed Dad's card while he was away on business to pay for an oak casket and a simple bouquet of yellow flowers that were Gram's favorite. It was the least he could do for her.

Most people say not to let anything hold you back from your dreams. The true part about that statement is that dreams can elevate us to great heights.

After Grandma's death, I discovered the lie; all your loved ones will be waiting for you? when you get there.

With my mint-flavored gum, I put up a picture of Gram's headstone over the apex of Dad's achievements and left New York in his electric car.