

FLASH NONFICTION

# To Live

by E. Izabelle Cassandra Alexander



"the politics of loneliness" by Desiree Dufresne

Colorless syllables linger across five thousand miles of phone lines. In desperate tears, I ask on the first day, “How do I exist deprived of my daughter? Without her here with me?”

“It’s only temporary,” my mother says. “Nothing lasts forever.”

“I understand,” pressing the receiver closer to my ear, I whisper and curl up in my maroon recliner, “but how do I go on till then?”

“You must live.”

The void I’m left with forces me into darkness, swallowing the light of this world. My daughter’s absence uproots and rips pieces of my soul, yet I need to mend the un-mendable.

Eight years pass...

Sunburned roses poke their heads toward me as I wander through the park. Dry leaves scatter the ground. Withered bushes fencing both sides, suppressing their beauty by the change of the season, the trail embodies the decay of life. Still, knowing that after the transformation, new and breathtaking views will lie ahead, gives me hope.

For a fleeting moment, I close my eyes to witness a winter wonderland with icicles hanging from the tired trees. I sense the peacefulness of falling snow at midnight and imagine glistening white crystals covering the path I must walk on.

For many years now, my imagination remains my aid. Equipped with this limitless perception, I can discern the seductive shades of the wilted, desiccated rose crunching and disintegrating beneath my heels. Perceive the kiss of frost like glitter adorning evergreen hedges. Soft, fuzzy bees pollinating white and pink lilies — if I choose, I can breathe in the fragrant scent. Hear the splashing, permeating mist of water fountains layered with children’s laughter as they chase each other around. Without this creative power, the world can be frightful and unsavory — an apple poisoned to its core.

My mind’s inner screen beholds my little girl, a halo of golden curls framing her face. Breathless, she runs. Sleeves rolled up and drenched. Shoes kicked to the side. Her tiny feet grazing over the wet, green grass, she flies.

Upon opening my eyes, like vapor, she disappears. So I move slow, squeezing them shut again, sliding my feet on the gravel, imagining her beaming as she races toward me on the playground. “Mommy!” she calls for me, holding out her arms, and flutters like a butterfly into my loving embrace.

Startled by kicking something hard, I direct my gaze to the disrupting object in my way. The bench, where we'd relax on tranquil walks, rests abandoned. Yet her words, "Put kisses in my pockets and under my hat," still resonate inside my ears — the proof of my love she wanted to keep when apart.

My hand swiping the cold wrought iron armrest evokes another depiction of the past. The pool's coolness as we enjoyed together each day of those sweltering summers.

Water droplets dancing on her eyelashes, she swims. "Did you see me? I jumped." On top of the waves, she floats. Her periwinkle-blue eyes sparkle.

"Yes, my angel," I say.

Those visions I keep near. For when I need a reminder, she's not an illusion. Real but no longer here.

On the first day, I asked my mother, "How can I live without my little girl?"

With a restrained voice, she answered, "Take one day at a time."

Dried leaves rustle up before me as I stand — immersed in my daughter's smile. Only an echo, yet still caressing my face like the sun's rays. Until the day when we'll reunite, she visits me in my sleep. At most times, only four or five-years-old, although she turned twelve this summer.

Two more years dribble by...

In my dream, last night, again, she came home and stayed. Clairvoyance? Wishful thinking? I wonder. The warmth of her affections still lingers within me.

She's left me with a heart in fragments. Gone. Yet I persevere, praying for her return.

In spirit, I'm with her, whispering, "I love you, Sweet Pea," wishing to help her decipher why on this physical plane, we're separated. The pile of unsent cards, I keep for her Birthdays, Christmases, and Valentines. In my journal, I write how much I miss her. How I wish I could hold and kiss her.

Will she remember me and search? What if we only meet again when she's a grown woman?

"Mom?" she'd say. The voice wouldn't be a little child's, but I would know in my heart.

Back on the trail, I envision reopening my eyes to take in the mirror image of the young me standing tall a few steps away. The twigs of the trees and shrubs, surrounding my beautiful

daughter, sprout new life at the sight of her. The sun shines bright.

After following my mother's advice, I live one memory, one imaginary moment, one lingering breath at a time.

For her.