Another Place, Another Time

“If there was an answer, he’d find it there.”

Saige Sweat

“So, what happened to Grandpa?” William Fondler asked his father, his voice full of suspense. The children had demanded that their papa tell a real, true story. Their father had decided to tell them the story of their Grandfather, Elmer. All of the three children sat, cross legged around their father’s feet and listened to their papa tell them the story of the mine collapsing.

“Well, son, your old grandfather, well, uh, he done got trapped down there.” Their father said, struggling for the right words.

“Oh. I see.” William said sadly.

“And still, no one knows why that mine just up and falled apart, sometimes we don’t got no idea why things happen the way they does, but sometimes, we just got to trust that it’s for a mighty good reason.” He explained.

“Alright Papa.” William said, sensing that his father didn’t want to go any further into the matter. Besides, what else was there to ask about?

“And then what happened, Papa?” Madeline asked. Madeline was the middle of the three. She was only five, but she was extremely intelligent.

“Well, then the police came and gave me the news.” Their father said with a sad sigh, then repeated himself. Not speaking to anyone in particular. It almost seemed he was talking to the air, as if it had said, “What did you say?”

“Then, why do you work in the mine, Papa?” William asked slowly and cautiously.

“Well son, there ain’t that many jobs ‘round here, and we don’t got the money to buy a new house to move into.” Papa explained, but it was much worse than that. Not only did they not have the money to buy a new home, but food and clothing were getting harder to buy. While everyone had their electricity on in the evenings, the Fondlers sat by candle light. William had worn the same pair of pants for two years now, his mother had to keep adding inches to them with Mr. Fondler’s old worn-out jeans. It was sad really, they had sold everything that they did not need. Even Everette, the two year old had no dolls, and hardly anything to wear. Mr. Fondler was hardly ever home, because after he worked himself sick at the coal mine, he had to go hunting. There were a lot of nights when the Fondlers went to sleep with hungry bellies. William, at nine years old, had already gotten a job
sweeping the floors of a dress shop in town. In the summer, he mowed the rich peoples’ lawns, and in autumn, he raked their leaves. It kept them fed a bit, but not much, and now that winter was here, they were almost starving.

“Papa, what’s that envelope?” Madeline asked curiously, addressing the small white envelope in his hand.

“Oh, it’s something for Momma and me.” He said smiling.

“Time for bed!” Mrs. Fondler yelled from the kitchen.

“Aww!” Madeline and William said in unison.

“We’ll finish the story tomorrow.” Mr. Fondler said, a smile spreading across his coal-stained cheeks.

But the story wasn’t finished tomorrow, or the next day, nor the next. And it never would be.


Madeline just burst into tears and Everette didn’t understand, but if they were crying, there must have been a good reason. So she joined in. The thing That William felt the most was anger. Anger at the mines, anger at the firemen, at the police, even slightly angry at his mother.

“How could he leave us?” William screamed above all of the sobbing.

“Why?” he asked, more quietly now, almost whispering.

“It wasn’t his fault William, the mine crashed down on him!” The words were hard to let go of on the tip of Mrs. Fondler’s tongue.

_The mine crashed down on him._

It echoed in Williams mind until he was almost sick.

_I know, but why? Why did it happen? Why couldn’t he have been sick or something? Why him? Why us?_ William thought as he lay in bed. And finally, he dozed off, into a restless sleep.

_Creaaakk, crock, creeaakk, crock._

William awoke in the middle of the night to strange noises. He got up out of his creaky old mahogany bed that was almost too small, and pulled off the faded old quilt. He walked into the kitchen carrying an iron rod. Tension rose in the little boy’s heart and mind as he snuck into the kitchen.

_Who is tha—…? Madeline!_ He thought. Realizing that it was his sister.

“What are you doing up, Maddy?” William asked her. She jumped, startled at his presence.

“Oh, um…” Madeline said, dumbfounded by his sudden appearance and now questions.

“Couldn’t sleep?” William asked, his voice full of empathy.
"How could I?" Dad’s not here." Madeline said sadly, yet it was almost dull. Like an old razor. Dull, with the tendency to cut you deeply, make you bleed, and leave a permanent scar.

“Well, Maddy go lay in your bed and try to get some sleep. Tomorrow is another day!” William said. Madeline just frowned. That was what their father said, every night when he came back empty handed from the mines. But of course, he was just saying that to comfort her. Just then, William noticed the dusty envelope on the counter top.

_I wonder what’s in there._ He thought.

“Goodnight.” Madeline said as she sulked back to her room.

After she was in her bed, William walked back into the kitchen and opened the envelope that had clearly never been opened before.

_Money? Papa had money?_ There was about one hundred and fifty dollars in there.

William didn’t sleep a wink all night.

_Tomorrow, I have to go to the mines and find out what happened. I have to. I have to. I have to._ William thought as he drifted off to sleep.

The next morning, when it was barely light outside, William put on his father’s favorite outfit of his, a sailors uniform and ran into Madeline’s bedroom. She wasn’t asleep either.

“Come on. Put on something nice of yours and let’s go.” William said gruffly.

“Where are we going, William?” Madeline asked her voice scared, but she wasn’t scared, more so alarmed that her brother was acting this way.

“Just get dressed! We have to leave before Mama wakes up!” William said as he raised his voice a bit.

Madeline put on her pink satin gown with a lace collar. Papa had always said that she looked like a little princess when she wore it. She threw on her old cowboy boots and ran out the door to catch William. He sauntered right up to Bobby and Billy’s house, they had been his friends ever since they could remember. Bobby and Billy were twins.

_Rap rap rap._ William’s knuckles hit the door hard.

“Ready?” William asked when the two boys came out.

“Ready!” They said in unison. William had their father’s blanket, and an old picnic basket in his hand. Billy put Madeline on his back and they ran. They ran to the old mine cart trail that the coal was transported on. William put a picnic basket in the cart and made the blanket into a sail and the wind blew them along. In the direction to the mine.

“William, how is this going to get us where we’re going?” Madeline asked with a hopeless look in her eyes.
“Don’t you worry your pretty little head, alright little princess?” Bobby asked.

“Don’t call me that.” Madeline said irritated. She hated it when people addressed her as if she were an infant. That, and that was what her father had always called her, and nobody had that right anymore except for Mama.

“Sorry, Maddy.” Billy said, apologizing for his brother.

“It’s alright.” Madeline said smiling. She favored Billy. He looked a little scruffy and dirty on the outside, but he had a heart of platinum.

The fog was thick most of the time, but William went anyway, with the same sail, same cart, and the same rusty old tracks. Sometimes, he went with Madeline, but most of the time, he went alone. He would go out to the old mine and sit.

*Why?* He would think, and sometimes scream it out loud at the wind. And rarely, William would hear his father’s voice in the wind saying, “Sometimes we don’t got no idea why things happen the way they does, but sometimes, we just got to trust that it’s for a mighty good reason.”

**But, what’s the reason?** William would think.

And he continued to go there once or twice a week until he got married. Annalise was her name and she was beautiful, with chocolate colored hair and bright blue eyes. She was also kind. They had three children and they were happy until the end of their lives. Their children’s names were Melody, the oldest John, then, Billy. William got to pick Billy’s name. And of course, Billy was named after William’s best friend. And they stayed friends. As long as they lived. William was finally happy. He often thought of his Papa, but he accepted it was for a greater purpose, and that he would see his Papa again one day.

“I love you Annie.” He’d say

“I love you too Willy.” She’d say back.

It was a tradition of theirs. Every night before drifting off to sleep, they would exchange those same words. William was finally happy.