

# ONE

We're all like paper dolls. Happiest when linked to another, often unaware of our flimsiness. So easily torn. What happens when we reach out to find there's no one there to hold our hand? I'll tell you what happens; we blow away into uncertain air, then desperately search for anything to pull us out of the chaos. Everyone is afraid of what happens if they don't get pulled out. *I* was afraid.

On a Saturday in early April, Andy interrupted my re-read of Peter Pan. He bobbed his head and crossed his arms over his chest, kicking at the carpet. He'd never entered my room before—as if it were a twilight zone bound to suck him up into oblivion.

Fairy-tale books had become a necessary mode of distraction for me, and the feel of grainy paper, therapeutic. I put my finger down on the page to keep my place. “What are you doing in here?” I asked, leaning against my headboard.

He fiddled with some knick-knacks on my dresser and picked up a foil owl I'd made. “Nice little set up you have. You make all these paper thingies?” He put the owl back in place.

“Uh-huh.”

Unfortunately, after reading so much fiction, I longed for it to become reality. I needed it to. So, I'd bought piles of various paper: rice, water-color, tissue, cardstock, etc. While cutting and folding, I tried to make fantastical worlds appear with all manner of creatures. It didn't have the effect I wanted, but I got to know paper. Its thickness, texture, suppleness. I even figured myself to be made up of the flexible variety. Namely, origami. Life bent me. Tore me. Tossed me. It seemed to deviate from following an outline, thus folding me in all the wrong ways.

I went back to reading until he cleared his throat. “Did you *need* something?”

One hand deep in his jacket pocket, jangling what sounded like coins or keys Andy said, “I...uh...got a new job.”

I closed my book in a snap. He and I never had conversations about his work. Heck, we hardly conversed at all. We spoke most at the supper table when he'd ask how my school day went. Even then, he tuned out a lot of what I said and continued listening to the news off the 19-inch, bubble-screen television set on top of a breakfast hutch in our kitchen. “A new job,” I repeated. “Well, that's good, right?”

“We're moving...at the end of your school year.”

“What?” I shot straight off my bed. “After all I've been through? You can't do this to me!”

## The Light Over Broken Tide

My doubts about being made of flesh and blood came after Mom passed away. I turned frail then, torn into a thousand paper shreds. Some pieces never to be retrieved again. Relatives worried. They hustled here and there after the funeral, trying to pick up the pieces and put me back together like Humpty Dumpty. The gaps in me had to be filled. And the solution, obvious.

It took five months for them to find Andy, and when they did it happened nothing like I imagined it would in my daydreams; being swept up into awaiting arms and told how much I'd been missed. As a substitute, I got awkward arm scratches, shuffling feet, and a pained smile. No resemblance to the young man with shining eyes and clean-shaven face who used to visit and send me things from time to time. The guy with worn suitcase in hand, who had stood in the doorway of my childhood house, claiming to be my Dad, had cross-hatched lines on his forehead, hair grown past his ears, and greyish-brown stubble on his chin. A total stranger who acted like no time lingered between us. Ignorant to those many years I waited for him to show up, call, write. Still, everyone thought it best we should be together.

Well, they couldn't have been more wrong.

(end of excerpt by Holly Ducarte)