*Grief is an Adaptation of Life*/ 989 words

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**Nantes, France- 2088**

“Where’s papa?” Theo stuttered.

“He’s going away on a long vacation.” I manage to squeak out as I fight back tears. How could I ever tell my six-year-old brother the truth?

“He’s dead.” Elliot said flatly.  I couldn’t believe my eight-year-old brother. Was he still that sweet little boy who would prank the voice activated speakers in the hover buses? Adele’s lower lip started to tremble.

“Papa’s dead?” Adele sobbed. My heart sank to the bottom of my stomach. What lie could I find to appease my three-year-old sister. I sent my nine-year-old sister Camille a pleading glance.

“I want Maman!” Adele screamed.  Her arms and legs flailed as she threw blind punches, sounding like a siren on steroids.

“Sérieusement.” *Seriously,* I muttered under my breath. I glared at Elliot. With a combined effort Camille and I drug Adele up the stairs and to her room. By the time we crossed the bedroom threshold Adele was fast asleep.

“Rene?” Maman asked from her room. I shook my head. Her face was wet with tears and her hair was twisted and tangled.  “I’ve made a decision.” She said between heaving sobs. “I’m going to America with your younger siblings.”

I gasp. “Without me?”  America was a continent away and I was a year from receiving my teleportation license, so that meant no visits. “You will stay here. I’m sorry mon amour,” *my* *love*. “You're the oldest and… well,”

She sobbed, “I need this baby.” I nodded. “I’ve already booked everything, and I think I can get the hologram hooked up too.” She paused, “I know Adam would want this.” Her blue eyes filled with hollow sadness as she said papa’s name.

“Is he really gone?” I whispered.  Maman nodded. I burst into tears and fell into her outstretched arms.

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I stood at the station and watched as the bullet train roared to life. Out the back window Camille and Theo’s faces were squashed against the glass. Camille blew kisses to me, and Theo directed funny faces my way.  I took this as a compliment and waved until the train speeded out of sight.   A hand rested on my shoulder.

“Réconforter.” *Cheer up*, *le chauffeur* soothed. A single tear trickled down my face.

“I miss Papa so much,” I confessed.

“Sweetie…” He started. I shrugged it off.

“Stop. It doesn’t matter, it's nothing.” I regretted that I’d ever said anything.  *Le chauffeur* could never understand.

I was sitting on Papa’s comfy chair fingering the flannel patterned canvas. It was practically the only thing in our house that wasn’t electronic.

“Why so gloomy?” I jumped.  I was still getting used to Adrienne, our digital assistant being everywhere.

“You’re lucky you’re not real, having feelings is hard.” I told her. The walls gave a loud harrumph.

“I think you're real, Addie.”  My stomach contracted. Adele? No, she was with Maman a continent away, it was probably just Adrienne, trying to be funny.  A strange silence filled the room.  Suddenly Adele’s pale face popped out from behind the composter.

“I'm here!” Adele giggled

“Elliot told me, when the train was about to go vroom-vroom, to get out and play hide and seek with him. So, I vroom-vroomed home and Elliot never found me.” I groan

“On what?”

“Telly-port-a-tion.” Adele butchered the word. I gasped. Adele could’ve been splinched.  But it wasn’t like you could undo the past. All that mattered was that she was safe. I needed to move forward.

“Adrienne, could you call mom?”

“Sure, thing.” Adrienne’s brain box shuddered. I braced myself. Bring-Bring-Bring.  The walls erupted in sound.

“I’m afraid she’s not available.” Adrienne intoned.

“Oh Elliot, you sure are in for it now.” I murmured. I trudged over to Adele and scooped her up.  She giggled gleefully.  I set her down on the kitchen counter.

“What would you like?”

“Milkshake.” She stated.

“How about some *carottes*?” She shook her head and crossed her arms in a pout.

“Adrienne, Adele would like some carrots.”

“No!” Adele shouted.  I opened the receiver box and pulled out a plate of sliced carrots.

“Papa!” Adele screamed.

“Papa’s not here.” I whispered. Adele’s blue eyes shined with tears. I needed a distraction, not just for Adele, but for me. And fast.

“I remember one time Papa took me fishing. We drove for hours up a dusty road. When we finally got there, we hiked to a lake. It was crystal blue and beautiful.  Then he taught me how to bait a line and then throw it out.”

“Did you catch any fish?” Adele asked eagerly.

“No.” I laughed. “We tried for hours, then gave up. On the way back we got sushi. Rainbow Roll…” I smiled. “Then we told Maman we caught the fish and made sushi. Papa told her to dig in. She was so mad!” We laughed because Maman hated sushi!

   “Let's go out.” I blurted. Adele's eyes lit up with mischief.  So, we put on Maman’s stilettos, jewelry, make-up, and dresses.  We looked ridiculous, but I didn't care.

We walked through our neighborhood, shouting things like, “I’m *une dame*!” and “Ooh-la-la! Kiss me, baby!”, which earned us questioning looks.

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I couldn’t sleep. I had cried myself dry, and I had this empty feeling in the pit of my stomach.  My door creaked open.  I shoved myself under my covers. My heart was pounding, I didn’t want to be shot like Papa.

“Rene?” I let out a sigh of relief.  Adele’s thin silhouette was braced against the door.

“I can’t sleep.” She whispered

“Me neither, Adele.” Without asking she tumbled into my bed and buried herself under the covers.

“I hate the milly-tary!” Adele burst at once.

“It’s not the military's fault papa’s….” I trailed off. “It’s the war’s fault.” I paused. “The war took papa.”

“Does dying hurt?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Do you think papa’s happy?”

“Yes” I smiled. Adele closed her eyes, and so did I.