



**Love: It's not that complicated.**

Go back 14 months. My mother's eyes are yellow. If she was white her skin would probably be yellow too. Instead it's a sallow sort of mahogany, faded and wan compared to her usually vibrant dark skin.

Her feet are swollen and she winces a bit when she walks. Fat-free yogurt and Carr's Table Water crackers are the only foods that she can keep down effectively. She sleeps for most of the day.

It's not hepatitis. We've all been vaccinated against it, so it's been ruled out. My father thinks it could be some other liver disease or gall bladder disease, but he's not sure. My father is never 'not sure'; he's a pillar of surety. After hours poring over dusty medical journals from his days as a resident at a hospital in New York, he decides to take her to the hospital so they can figure out what's wrong.

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My father never worries when we're sick; as a pediatric endocrinologist, he deals with children who have real problems, so the trivial viruses and infections of everyday life are nothing major in his eyes. His favorite joke is that he'll "chop off" our painful body parts, from blistered feet to aching heads to dislocated shoulders, when we complain. My mother is the one who worries, who gives us medicine, who takes us to the doctor. Because our father isn't our doctor. He's our father.

They are quite a pair.

My mother is sentimental in her every action. She shows her love with the little things, like her handiwork with sewing and her incredible cooking. She signs all of her text messages to me “Love: Mommy,” even though I’ve explained to her time and time again that she doesn’t *actually* need to sign her texts. Whenever I come home from college, my favorite stuffed animals, Skippy (the peanut-butter colored dog) and Bear, (who has crooked eyes), are always perfectly arranged on my pillows—her doing. Above my bed, there is a mounted and framed collage entitled “Rainbow” that I made with tissue paper and glue in my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade art class. My mother has saved it for the past 13 years, through multiple cross-country moves, despite its complete lack of artistic merit.

My father displays his love less overtly; for him, it’s about sharing his knowledge and life experience. He’s rarely openly sentimental, but his shoulders drop a bit when I refuse to go out for a drive with him, just as his face lights up when I ask him to help me with my taxes. He nodded briefly when my sisters and I gave him the Planet Earth DVDs for Christmas, but then made us watch the whole series with him for the next three days, seeming confused and disappointed when we finally begged him to stop somewhere between “Caves” and “Ocean Deep.”

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I knew that when he was worried that she was sick, it was the real deal. But I never knew it would get as bad as it did. It turns out that it was hepatitis after all. E, to be exact; one of the ones that doesn’t really make the news.

One year ago, I flew home to Michigan in the middle of the week, more terrified than I’ve ever been in my life. My mother was in the emergency room. She couldn’t remember my name or any of my sister’s names. She couldn’t walk, she couldn’t eat, she couldn’t understand what was going on around her. The little things were gone, and I didn’t know if they would ever come back. Even now, the memory of those times makes my throat close.

My father was miraculous. He was everything all at once—a father, a doctor, a pillar of surety, and a master of the sentimental little things. I have never ever seen a person look at someone with as much love as he looked at my mother. He stayed with her every night, went to work, and took care of his shell-shocked children, day-in and day-out. He would fall asleep in the hospital holding her hand almost every night, sitting on what could be the world’s most uncomfortable chair. He snuck her chocolate for dessert; he combed her hair and told her she looked beautiful, even when she couldn’t figure out who he was. My mother was never alone, and neither were we – he had enough love to carry us all.

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My parents came to visit this past weekend. This is the first year that they’ve both been able to visit me together. They came here because they love me, and they came together because they love each other, and my father doesn’t want my mother to have to be alone.

Her skin is back to its usual deep and vibrant hue. There's not a hint of yellow in her eyes, and she remembers every little thing that she always did. She even brought me banana chips; she knows I love them. In his typical fashion, my father helped me with my taxes and lectured me on my iron-deficiency. Mom walks a little slower and gets tired a little faster, and dad holds her hand to help her sometimes, but all is well in our world.

From them, I've not only learned, but truly seen, what love is. Love is saving your daughter's ugly collage from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and getting it framed and mounted; it's decorating her room and putting everything in its place because you love her so much. Love is my father and I holding each other, crying our eyes out in the basement, because everything is going so terribly wrong, and then getting up the next day to face it again with smiles on our faces. Love really isn't that complicated at all.