

China

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by [SLWalker](#)

Summary

Eighteen-year-old Len McCoy packs away his mother's china before starting pre-med and thinks.

Notes

Originally written a long time ago for Cuppy. <3 Hope you're okay out there, dear.

He kept trying to concentrate, but instead found himself watching the particles of dust floating through the bands of warm sunlight coming through the window. Not because he particularly cared about the particles. It was just something to look at.

The sun had crept a good distance across the hardwood floor since he started this, and he wasn't even close to finished yet. It shoulda only taken him an hour or so, but he kept drifting off into thought.

Len managed to break himself away from it yet again, then looked down at the plate he was carefully holding by its edges, balanced on his knees. Magnolias were delicately painted under clearcoat, and the edges were a slightly worn gold. But despite the coat of dust on it, it was intact and in good shape.

They had never been used in his lifetime.

Passed down from mother to daughter, the china was old. Real old. Len wished he knew how old, but he honestly didn't have a clue. All he knew was that it had been his mother's, and grandmother's, and so on. He imagined it probably had a story, maybe some wedding present long ago or some purchase made by his less-than-rich ancestors to try to instill some elegance into their lives, but everyone who could have told him that story was long gone.

He tried to shake off that messed up, frightened feeling, but it just made a home somewhere in the pit of his stomach and refused to leave. Carefully, just like he had however many times now, he wrapped the plate in tissue paper and nested it into the heavy duty box it was to be stored in.

His dad shoulda been here for this.

Most of the time, Len didn't think about it. At least not these days. When he was younger, yeah, it bothered him more; he spent a whole lot of time in hospitals, sitting with nurses, waiting while his father did his thing. At the earliest, it had been an adventure. As he got older, an annoyance. Finally, when he was fifteen or so, his father trusted him enough to leave him at home alone.

It wasn't like he was completely unsupervised. Their neighbors and family friends all checked up on him and made sure he was all right. He was certainly old enough to feed himself, dress himself and get to school.

He swore then he would never be a doctor. It wasn't that he hated the profession, or didn't respect the men and women who did it. He even admired his father's dedication to it. He just didn't want to live in a world where there was never any time to slow down; might not be ready for a family yet, but he had always been sure he'd someday have one. Wife, kids, house. It wasn't possible to be a doctor and be a family-man. If David McCoy couldn't seem to pull it off, Leonard McCoy was sure he wouldn't have any better luck.

He swore he'd never be a doctor, but he was due to start pre-med training in three days.

Len narrowed his eyes at the stack of china plates and picked the next one up; held it carefully on his knees, avoiding looking at the banded

sunlight where dust particles danced. Thought about it all; his life, his father, his mother, the china, the training.

Ended up looking at the dust in the sun anyway.

He was seventeen when he changed his mind. Walking home one late afternoon from where he'd been tutoring one of his classmates in mathematics; a long walk, ten miles or so, and about halfway through it and still in the countryside, he came across a dog dying in a ditch on the roadside. He didn't see any injuries on it, but it was clear that the brown mutt was dying.

It wasn't that Len didn't want to help, because he did. God, he did. But still he hesitated there, staring at this dying dog. Hating himself for just standing on the roadside instead of moving to help.

But the fact was-- he was scared.

If he moved to help, then it became his responsibility. If he tried to save the animal and it died, he would never be able to forget it. If he did the wrong thing, he would only make things worse.

Its whining moved him; he only hesitated maybe a half a minute, if even that. Then, his chest tight and his throat suddenly dry and rough, he moved.

The dog died anyway.

It died in his arms. He didn't even know what had killed it. It died a mile later, in the arms of a lanky, sweaty, clueless seventeen-year-old who hadn't even been sure he should have tried to save it. Who didn't have the knowledge to. Who couldn't do a Goddamn thing to change it.

After all that, he did find its family; stopped at a house along the way to use the comm and instead of calling the animal welfare agency, the owner of the house recognized where the dog was from. And he carried it back to its family, feeling even worse when they thanked him through their tears.

It wasn't an epiphany or anything. Hell, if anything, it made him even more determined not to be a doctor, not to ever be put into the situation where any life could depend on him.

But he still spent hours stopping by the library, picking up books. Told himself it was curiosity about what coulda killed the dog; his first foray into studying medicine was veterinary medicine. He told himself a lot of things then: That it didn't mean he wanted anything to do with the medical field, that it was just trying to find some-- some absolution in that moment, the moment the dog died, that he didn't want to be in that same situation again.

He started with books on animals, then the occasional book on human and xenobiology, then--

He didn't want to be his father.

Shaking himself away from it, almost fiercely, he swiftly packed up the rest of the china. His mother's china, pretty stuff that had a story he would never know. Packed it because his father never would be home long enough to remember to do it. He knew that when he left this house, it would sit empty for weeks at a time and maybe even more.

He didn't want to ever do that. Try to be a doctor and have a home and family at the same time. He knew too well that there was no way to do both right -- it had to be one or the other. Sure, Dad had talked about opening a family practice right here in town.

It just never happened.

There were too many *nevers* in Len's life. But maybe once he got the china packed and got out of here, and got buried in pre-med; maybe once he managed to get-- confident or something, he would figure it all out.

Maybe when he got out, he would remember other things and the *nevers* would be forgotten. Maybe he would forget the dog, forget the china, forget that it was impossible to be a good doctor and a good husband and father at the same time.

But it all had to start somewhere.

In the banded sunlight filled with floating dust particles, Len McCoy closed the box on his mother's china.

Maybe it could begin here.

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