

## “Once More”

Once more, I remember, where instead of three, we were four. We lived huddled together in a small apartment space that was part of the many clusters of student housing buildings in the area. Though we did not have much, we had the world, you and mom, my little sister and me. Though those times are long gone, I can still recall the nights you would come home from work and we would rush to the open door, where we ran into your embrace, giggling as you spun us around in strong arms. Mom would watch from the stairs with a small smile on her face, and after you hung up your coat, we would all retreat back to the couch, where we would remain snuggled together for the rest of the night until we fell asleep. Back then, all we needed to be happy was each other. The home was full of joy and laughter and our days were sweet like summertime.

Once more, I remember when the laughter went away. Though I'll never know why, everything slowly began to change. Bitterness tainted words that were once tender, and land mines appeared in places where had not been any before, erupting with one wrong move. Angry voices now filled the house that you did not come home to anymore, and from the second story window, I watched summertime give way to fall as you slowly drifted away with the leaves in autumn's cool breeze.

Once more, I remember when you packed up and went away. I watched your car disappear in the white winterland outside our window, and felt my heart freeze over. I couldn't understand why you would leave if you loved us like a father should, and I was left to wonder endlessly, asking the same questions over and over, desperately searching for answers. Was it my fault? Was I not enough? If I had been a better daughter would you have stayed? Why didn't you love our family anymore? Why didn't you love me anymore? The wounds on my heart turned into icy scabs of resentment. Because of you, our family was broken, and nothing could ever go back to the way it was before. Mother cried every night, and my sister and I watched her world fall around her like the snow building steadily on the driveway you had always shoveled before.

But once more, I also remember how our world changed for the better. Out of the ashes my mother rose, with flaming wings and a brilliant orange tail. The ice melted and gave way to spring, and my sister, mother and I, hopeful buds in the new grass, slowly began to bloom as we healed, even without you there. Memories of bitter winter faded, and we adjusted to life as three instead of four. Though the process had started out unsteady, we learned how to move on and overcome, and could stand on our own feet, strong together.

But every now and then, I think back to sweet summertime, cozy nights on the couch and the comfort of being held in your arms, and wish for a moment that I could be there again once more.

(Word Count: 535)