

The tradition of My Papa

I was avoiding the deep murky mud, I loathed it when almond dark smudges clawed up my costume. Mama embedded beautiful glossy jewels of purple, yellow and green, into my long white lacy cape and I would hate to see it ruined with mud. I knew we were approaching when I began to feel the deafening vibrations of the instruments and the loud sound of laughter; my eyes were irritated from the lights. My scratchy glittered carnival hugged my face tight. My dark thick curls were scrunched into a high ponytail.

I could see the curly gray moss grip themselves to the chaotic branches of fathomless mahogany oak trees.

I was bundled with excitement, we would stop at the Brown's Bakery.

Lilly Brown was my best friend, and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Brown owned the local bakery, it was a block away from where I lived, Marengo street, I would always view parades with her at the end of Napoleon avenue; Lily and I would always stand very close to the floats to catch beads.

The Brown's bakery baked the best king cakes in New Orleans; we always stopped there every mardi gras morning before going to Rex.

Although I always relished the comfort my neighborhood brought, giving us food like gumbo.

When Mama and I entered the bakery the sweet scent of cinnamon and vanilla pierced through our noses like a spear,

"Oh Isabelle, you look beautiful in that new costume your mother made you," Mrs. Brown said. Her rosy cheeks and dimples distinguished with her humble smile.

My mother grinned and directed shiny eyes filled with appreciation towards Mrs. Brown.

"Thank you," I said.

"How bout' you two take a seat?" She motioned her hand to a couple of lovely linen chairs with a nude flower pattern.

I nodded in response. And Mama happily took a seat in one.

"Now let's see," she said trying to recall a thought,

"Oh right, what kind of king cake would you prefer this year?"

I had tremendously anticipated this question all morning.

"Maybe something new this year? Like raspberry, I heard cream cheese filling was nice too?" Mama suggested.

"No," I said stubbornly, "Mama, why can't we simply have the original like we do every year?" Mama sighed and smiled wearily.

"Well, Kelly I guess one classic king cake to go please!" Mama said.

Mrs. Brown's deep hazel eyes stared into mine; with a fatigued expression she said, "Sweetie, I can promise, you having a different king cake won't change the tradition,"

I crinkle my eyebrows together and projected my voice so everyone could hear,

"Only once a year this time comes and if I don't spend it the same every year it will ruin the tradition, the tradition of my Papa..."

Mama and Papa would take me to Rex every Fat tuesday. But his gentle smile and his rough hands that I dearly valued were gone now. The only way he can still live is every mardi

gras day, so it must always be the same. I began to see his face, his deep blue eyes and short curly hair, this tradition is all I have left of him....

Before I knew it tears glazed my eyes like the colorful kingcake I so dearly love, the Papa I so dearly love.

Mama immediately understood and wrapped her hands around me, not like Papa's warm comforting embraces though. She softly spoke,

"It's okay baby, I understand, I miss him too,"

Mama smiled sadly,

"Kelly, I think we're ready to go. Is Lilly ready as well?"

"Um yeah, no problem, I'll go get her and tell Frank to get that king cake,"

Mrs. Brown smiled happily, if she was trying to comfort me, she failed in doing so.

The walk with Lilly and Mama was silent; I could hear the loud wrinkling sound of the plastic bag that carried the king cake brush Mama's leg.

The Royal Barge was traveling down Napoleon avenue.

I motioned my hand so Lilly would follow me to my favorite spot.

Mama trailed behind, smiled lightly and nodded signaling I could go ahead.

The float appeared before us, it looked just like my beautiful colorful Papa.

Me and Lilly smiled wide, begging for beads and candy.

The sun refracted my eyes; it reminded me of Papa's smile, maybe he was looking down on me.

"I can't wait for that king cake!" Lilly said grinning.

Just maybe my tradition can be different this year,

"Yeah, same!" I said mirroring Lilly's joyful grin.