

Past the Borders

from the manuscript *A Rabbit's Heart: A Memoir*

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I'm in my mid-thirties, and I've come home to Oklahoma to visit family. I'm staying at my father's new house, no room familiar or my own. We're eating a "snacky night" dinner, just the two of us, cold cuts and crackers and cheese and ranch dip laid out on his kitchen island. He builds a sandwich with pepperoni, salami, and muenster on white bread saturated with mustard, while I sit on the barstool and eat Kellogg's new cracker chips.

"These are pretty good," I say.

"Yeah, I like 'em."

It feels like the right time to tell him. We're miles away from the home I grew up in, my husband Jerry is back in Pennsylvania working, I'm finally finding the words to speak.

Lately I've been going to doctors and physical therapists for pelvic floor dysfunction, which means that for years (since the beginning?) the majority of my pelvic muscles around and in my vagina have been so tight they rip apart. After years of painful sex and male doctors telling me it wasn't a big deal—*You don't have to worry about that until you want to have children*—I found an OB/GYN who said, Yes, this is a problem,

and No, you don't have endometriosis, and Due to trauma your body learned that constant tightness and pain is normal. *You'll need to learn to let go*, she had said.

I had heard her say this, heard the physical therapist repeat it while her hands were inside me, slowly stretching the muscles to release their tension, but I hadn't really processed it. Not until I lay alone in my room one night, lights off, Enya's *Watermark* playing from my phone, me on top of the covers, naked from the waist down. The light from a street lamp shone through the open blinds. When I used a dilator the therapist had given me—now one size up from the one I had been using with its circumference like a pencil's—and pushed it inside me to stretch the muscles myself, my body reacted. I had been completely relaxed with Enya singing about distant shores, until that thing, nearly the size of a penis, was inside me. That thing that I was controlling with my own fingers. I wanted it out. No, I wanted it in, but my body wanted it out. It pushed, while I tried to hold it there with my trembling hands. Then it hit me, and it was every bit as violent as the word *hit*. For the first time in my life, with no one but me in the room, with a dilator and not my fingers or my husband's, without my beloved's skin against mine, without his lips pressed to my neck, without his breath, heavy and arousing and warm, to distract me from my body, I felt the extent of the trauma. My body knew it. Had known it for 20 years. And now its memory was fighting my hands.

Only then did I understand.

I am a victim.

For months I had accepted *trauma*, *abuse*, a few times even *rape*, but never the term *victim*. How could I? Two men hadn't hit my head from behind and dragged me screaming

to my car and bound my hands behind my back and then dumped my body in an oilfield.

That was my mother.

But now, after my body had fought me, I've come home to claim the word.

It seems right to tell Dad now, to explain the history of my body. I've told him about my muscles, and to his credit, he's been asking how therapy is going, but he doesn't want the details about how the therapist has to spend an hour with her fingers inside me, and we haven't talked about why my body is holding memory in its fibers.

Besides, I'm back to writing, and I always knew I would tell him before he ever read it on a page. It seems kinder this way.

But talking about sex is awkward, of course. My father has always been a more formal man, but with the topic of sex this becomes amplified, as if the language we use can protect us. When I was young, he'd explain how "the prostate produces the pre-ejaculation fluid" and I'd ask, "What is that?" making certain to get the pitch correct, as if I had not felt it on my hands, sticky and warm, or tasted it in my mouth. When I wanted to be on the pill, I complained to him that my periods were irregular and said the pill would help. From that point on, he called it the *menstrual cycle regulation pill* rather than *birth control*.

I sit in the barstool and watch him grab something else out of the fridge. "Dad, I'd like to talk to you about a potentially difficult topic. I'm starting to write again and I'm curious about your perspective on my coming of age and the experiences I had."

"Okay," he says, as he scoops some dip onto his plate.

I'm not certain I'm ready for this. And I don't want to look at his face when I ask. But he's standing right next to me, and it feels odd to just stare at my food as if I feel shame.

"What were your thoughts, then and/or now, on my relationship with the neighbors?"

There. I asked it. It's out there and I can't turn back.

"To be honest?" he says. He sets his spoon down and looks right at me, as if he's been waiting years for this. "I'm just going to be quite pointed about it. That was when I felt the most disappointed in you. And absolutely the most deflated as a parent."

Disappointed. In me.

"Why disappointed?"

"Because you knew I would think it was wrong, and you defied me. That this was happening right next door. With a man I talked with, cut lawns with, he even helped me move."

Disappointed.

He says, "I remember three to four instances. The time you went to the lake in Arkansas, the night I waited on the front porch, the time I busted through his door and found you, and I think there was a time I went over there and found you. Now when they happened and in what order, I don't know."

Disappointed in me.

"When you went to Arkansas, you were adamant that you were going to go."

I could tell him what I remember about that Arkansas trip—that Joe had begged me to stay at a lake house with his friends, that we fought on the drive up and that he played John Lennon's "Jealous Guy" as an apology, that I stood in the kitchen with his thirty-something-year-old friends and talked

about literature and writing and art and about my mother's abduction, that I watched as their looks transformed from *Who the hell is this 19-year-old* and *What is Joe thinking* to *Wow, this girl is more mature than she looks* and *I can't believe she's gone through that and is so poised*, that they played right into my hands because I knew how to use Mom's murder as a way to age me, that after Joe barefooted on blue water and we returned to the house, he yelled at me for taking too long to dry my hair and embarrassing him in front of his friends.

I could tell Dad this, but it's clear that he wants to talk, that he has something more to say.

Instead, I say, "I don't remember the bursting through the door moment."

"I walked over to Joe's and the blinds were open where I could see everything. Now you weren't having sex but it was clear that it was commencing. You popped up and came to the door and tried to block me from coming in."

"Why?"

"Because Joe was trying to zip up his pants. And I pushed around you and there was Joe, standing there all smug."

I doubt Joe was *smug*. More likely he was scared shitless and tried to pass it off as nothing. Exactly like a teenager would do. Even though he was in his 30s.

"I really don't remember that," I say.

Dad sits down next to me at the island and grabs some more crackers for his plate. We're not looking at each other, father and daughter side by side—him sinking his teeth into spongy white bread, me staring down at my sandwich and chips.

I'm still stuck on *disappointed*, still trying to figure out memory and how I could have forgotten a moment when

Dad, Joe, and I all stood in the light of Joe's living room. What did we say at that moment?

"Now I know about young women's sexuality," Dad says, "and that it's natural to seek answers from a safe environment, but I just couldn't believe that it was happening next door, I mean right under my nose . . ."

"That's not what that was, Dad."

". . . If you had gone off with someone else, somewhere else and I didn't know about it, then so be it, but this was *right* under my nose."

I fidget with my glass of water, placing the base of the pilsner on the dark spots in the granite, trying to line up the edges. I don't know what to think about Dad's saying he knows about women's sexuality. About our seeking answers in safe places. When I hit puberty, did he research that in a book with a title like *How To Raise a Daughter Alone*?

My fingers shake as I lift the glass to my lips then set it back down on the black spot in the marble.

"You know so little, really."

"Well, you just asked about what I thought."

Dad moves across the kitchen to get a little more cheese. He likes the Baby Bellas and the Sea Salt chips. When he steps away from the counter, his oxygen hose catches on the knob of a drawer.

"Damn it," he says.

"So it was because Joe was our neighbor, but what about his age?" I ask.

"Well, that was part of it too. I certainly lost all respect for Joe."

I remember the night Dad sat on the front porch and watched me sneak back from Joe's house at 4:00 in the

morning. We had stood in the kitchen of my childhood home, me with my shoulders hunched to hide the fact I wasn't wearing a bra, him in his summer robe. I had said Joe wanted to talk about possibly dating and that I had fallen asleep while we watched a movie, before I shifted the discussion to logic: "When I'm 60 and Joe's 74, it won't matter," I had said, "so why does it matter now?" I knew, even then, that he'd prefer to push away the complexity of it all, of a daughter needing something from an older man that she herself couldn't even understand, so I offered him an analysis of numbers.

It's a gift he should not have taken.

"Why didn't you tell Joe to stay away from me?"

He looks up from his plate and stands right in front of me. "He was a grown man, outside of my control. Besides, my problem was not with Joe. My problem was with *you*."

He is *pointed* when he says this. It's sharp, angry, bitter. Meant to jab.

And it does.

"You still sound upset," I say.

"Well, I am. Again, I felt absolutely the most defeated."

Defeated, disappointed, deflated, defied. All terms of power. He wasn't angry at Joe. He never raged against him but he's raging against me now, in the form of sharp Ds. It all comes down to my sleeping with his neighbor where he knew about it, instead of hiding it with someone else, someone farther away, like my high school boyfriend who lived a few streets over. It all comes down to Dad, not having the power to stop me.

I don't think to point out that the men who killed Mom were grown men too, outside of his control, but that he wants to kill them nonetheless. Instead I'm stuck on *disappointed*.

I keep returning to the word. It says the fault was mine. It says that I had the power to act otherwise. I tell myself not to succumb to it. I tell myself that I have come too far to return to shame, even when it's clear that he's still in pain. I tell myself he doesn't know what happened, but that doesn't keep me from feeling like a piece-of-shit daughter.

He begins cleaning up the kitchen. Puts away the salami, the pepperoni, the shaved ham with layers of green mold—"Now, I'm putting this in the fridge so that it doesn't spoil more before I have time to throw it out in the trash"—the string cheese, sliced provolone, the block of cheddar, the block of Monterey jack, the ham salad a grotesque pink. He places a knife in the sink.

"Where do you want to continue this conversation?" I ask, still staring down at my plate and his counter, his used Kleenexes flattened and drying not far from me.

"Well, first I have to take a restroom break, and then we can sit on the couches."

I stare at the one cracker chip left on my plate. I want to smash it with my fist. Instead I stand and grab a box of tissues and go sit on the loveseat. His problem was with me, never with Joe.

Dad returns from the bathroom and sits down in his chair. On any other night, he would turn on the TV, turn the volume way up, and pick the food out of his teeth with a toothpick. On any other night, I would get my computer out and scroll news websites. But here we are, facing one another, me sitting cross-legged on the couch, tissue box in front of me.

"You know, it amazes me that I've told other people what I'm about to tell you, but with you it's so difficult," I say, beginning

to cry. “I’m afraid to tell you, especially because you’re probably going to feel even more disappointed in me.”

He keeps his arms on the armrests of his chair, his body open, while I slump and curl into a ball. My lip is quivering. I run my finger back and forth on the bottom of my lower lip and look across the room rather than at him. I tell him everything then—

How I grew up wondering if my body were normal. How his girlfriend, when I told her that I got my first pubic hair, asked to see it and then, in the bright light of her bathroom, said, *Mine never get that long*, before she handed me the scissors.

About how I began flirting with Joe and Kyle, the two roommates next door, by laying out in the driveway in my bikini, and then, in the summer before my senior year of high school, when I was just 17, Joe kissed me while I was hanging out at their house. “I wanted to say no,” I tell him, “but I also liked that he wanted me, this older guy who dated beautiful women. It made me feel beautiful too.”

About the night when Joe was out of town and Kyle took me to a bar and bought me drinks. How he told me to take my bra off, then he unbuttoned my shirt, holding it open to show off my breasts to the group of bikers at the table next to us.

That biker had said, *I want to take you for a ride sometime*.

About how Joe would sometimes get jealous and slam me against the wall.

About another night when Kyle took me to a bar, got me drunk, and drove me to his friend’s house. He had gotten me a surprise, he had said. A sex toy with two steel balls that vibrated. I tell Dad how the toy broke inside me, how terrified

I was that I'd have to go to the hospital to have the remaining ball removed. And about how, after I was able to get it out myself, Kyle and his friend told me to do a strip tease for them, to touch myself for them, until they had the curiosity about how far up a long neck of a beer bottle can go.

About how I had sex with them both that night.

Then I say, "But I think I really just wanted a connection with Mom."

I tell him about how, when we later had DNA testing done on evidence in Mom's car and the results came back that her DNA was on a beer bottle and the detective answered *saliva* rather than *vaginal* when I asked what type of fluid was on the glass, I felt disappointed.

"It made me wonder," I say, "how much I put myself in these violent situations with Kyle and Joe just so I could feel close to her."

I throw it all at him, my voice shaky, my body tense, while he watches me with no expression on his face.

We sit in silence for a while.

I know it's a lot to take in.

The painting called *Jazz Lady* hangs above the fireplace, a gift from me and Jerry. Dad's chess sets are displayed on tables, including the jazz set he bought when we were together in New York. All around the room, there are objects and memories of us—glass sculptures and candles and the plasma plate that pulses with his music—but those times feel far away now.

I break the silence and ask, "Are you angry now that you know?"

"Oh, sure, now that I know it wasn't quote unquote consensual. I want you to know though, that I don't feel disap-

pointed now. Now I feel nothing but pride. The disappointment is in the past.”

He isn't referring to this moment though. It isn't as if what I've just told him has changed everything. He means he doesn't feel disappointed in me in general now, that he's proud of who I have become—married, with a PhD, teaching as an assistant professor at a university outside Philly. I wish he were saying, *I was wrong to feel disappointed in you then. You were hurting. You were lost. And I'm proud of you for having the strength to endure what you did.*

More silence. For seconds? Minutes?

Then he says, “I wish I had known and had seen the warning signs. I was constantly looking for signs that we needed counseling. I tried to tell you that you could ask me questions. I know it's natural to have questions and seek answers.”

I don't know why he's returned to this, after all that I have said. I think back to when I did get counseling, when I was in middle school and had been busted for shoplifting. After weeks of therapy, the counselor concluded that I needed to talk to my father more, but how could I have asked, *Dad, are my breasts big enough?*

I don't remind him of the counseling. Instead I say, “I did my best to hide it from you, Dad.”

I tell him that Joe and Kyle were abusive, that they didn't respect me or my body, that my body did say no and that this is why I'm having so much trouble with my pelvic floor muscles, that everything was so tight and painful and that I didn't know that pain wasn't normal. I'm looking at him now, my body calmer since the worst of the details are over.

“Did you think I was abusive to your mother?” he asks.

“Um, no” It’s such an odd question, and I’m sure the look on my face shows my confusion.

“Then why couldn’t you work that in reverse, where you recognized that not all relationships were abusive and that what you were experiencing wasn’t normal, so that you could get yourself out?”

“Because that requires distance Dad—to use the logic that my father didn’t abuse my mother so Joe shouldn’t abuse me. I’d trim my pubic hairs in the middle of the night and tuck a towel at the bottom of the door so no one could see the light and then I’d wad the hairs up in notebook paper and then stuff it in the bottom of my trash can so no one would find out. That’s not exactly a rational mind. I mean, that’s pretty messed up.”

He nods.

This isn’t what I really think though. It wasn’t my mind that was the problem. Burying the hairs in the trashcan or wrapping my arms around Joe and saying *I’m sorry* after he punched the post of his bed is exactly what I had been *taught* to do.

But instead of saying this, I do what I can to protect him and say, “I didn’t begin to gain perspective until my college boyfriend found out and wanted to beat up Joe.”

Dad nods again.

“And then not until Jerry. I remember telling him about Kyle and his friend and being so ashamed and Jerry just took me into his arms and asked me if I enjoyed it at all.”

Dad winces as I say this, as if he can’t understand how pleasure is a factor here or why Jerry would ever ask this question.

“It let me see it as complex, Dad. That yes, I enjoyed it because I felt desirable and feminine and beautiful and that maybe my body was normal.”

“Do you think things would be different if your mother had lived?”

“I don’t know. There are so many stories about young girls, my students even, who have had experiences like mine and they have had mothers. Would it have been different if Mom were there and I saw her naked from time to time? Would it have been different if a woman were around to offset the two men in our family? Would I have said no to Joe then? I just don’t know.”

He keeps his arms spread over the armrests. I’m amazed he’s been able to keep them so still. But then he looks to his shoes and flexes one foot and says, “What, if anything, do you want or need from me? Was writing and the doctor just an excuse to get this off your chest?”

The question trips me up. On the one hand, it’s kind and supportive, Dad asking me what I need, but it’s also delivered in such a matter-of-fact way. It isn’t the same as saying “How can I help?” His *if anything* sounds like I shouldn’t want something; his *excuse* sounds like an accusation. When all I had wanted was to soften the blow.

“I just wanted to know what you thought happened and how you felt about it. And I did feel that hearing it from me would be better than reading it in print one day, and that it’s better that Jerry isn’t here for this conversation.” Jerry, I think, would have lost it on the word *disappointed*.

He nods again.

“I didn’t have any expectations really, but I guess if there’s anything I want from you, it’s that I want you to be angry at Joe and Kyle.”

“That’s understandable.”

That’s all he gives me.

I'm sitting in front of you, lip quivering, trying to hold back my crying. You can see this. You can see the emotion as I tell you about the beer bottle inside me. You can see me bite my lip. My body trembling. And you say, That's understandable. No *I* in the sentence.

I didn't even know what I wanted until this moment. I want him to feel rage toward Kyle and Joe. To say, *I want to give them a piece of my mind. I want to shoot them, starting with their toes.* I want him to say, *I'm sorry. I'm sorry you went through this. I'm sorry I didn't protect you.*

And then I ask, "If I had told all of this to you then, if you had known, would you still feel disappointed in me?"

"Yes," he says.

"You wouldn't feel angry?"

"I'm sure I would. I might have railed against you."

I didn't mean *angry at me*.

"I might have gone next door and railed against them."

"Your disappointment and railing against me would have made matters worse and reinforced my shame," I say.

"You can't be doing that," he says, an edge back in his voice. "You're talking from a position of hindsight now. You can't go back and know how you would have reacted then, to say that you would have felt something in a 'what if' situation." His hands grip the edges of the armrests.

He's upset again, and I don't really know why. I think about telling him that it isn't difficult to know this because 30 minutes ago I felt shame, and if I feel it now I would have felt it then. Some things don't change. I've always been the daughter, scared of rejection. But more than this, I want to knock him off his power pedestal where he thinks he knows more than I do.

“Railing against me or the neighbors probably wouldn’t have changed much. We would have gone around any road-blocks you put up.”

I should have used his words and said, *I would have defied you anyway.*

“That’s probably true,” Dad says. “It’s just a matter of biology and men’s primal nature . . .”

Before he can finish, I’m raging myself, about biology and sexuality and cultural definitions of men and women and studies about female sexuality and porn and how women are not the receivers that society says they are and that even if you want to argue biology then you have to look at the fact that men have more fully-developed brains than other animals and that they can stop their own biological impulses and say, Okay, I’m going to lay off . . .

“Whoa, whoa,” he says. “You’re off on a soapbox now. I don’t even know what all this is about but you’re clearly on a soapbox and that isn’t going to work.”

“Yeah I am, because I’m tired of these excuses for men’s behavior” and *because I’ve grown up with your beliefs in my head.*

“Well, you need to get off the soapbox. Before you interrupted me, I was going to say that if there is a woman in a revealing dress and a woman dressed like the Amish and they are both standing right here, it’s just a matter of biology that a man is going to make a pass at the woman in the revealing dress or bikini.”

And so it begins. An argument like many others we’ve had—it’s a matter of biology, no, it’s society that allows him to feel like he should make a pass, no, it’s biology that dictates that a man is attracted to the fit woman and not the obese one

(somehow the Amish woman also became obese), and I say no, just look at how definitions of beauty have changed, where what was considered as beautiful during the Renaissance is not the same as the skinny girls today, and he concedes this point but then returns to biology because the cardinal is red to attract the female and she is just brown so we're attracted to adornment and while he thinks it's *interesting* that it is the male cardinal that is adorned where women are the ones who adorn themselves with makeup today, it somehow doesn't change his claim about biology.

"What I'm saying is a woman who dresses provocatively increases the risk that a man will ask her to dinner."

I should dissect the language in front of him. Why is there *risk* if there is nothing to complain about? I should say, When Joe and Kyle *made a pass* at me, they didn't ask me out to dinner. Nor did our doctor or my teacher or the old man across the street when they harassed me. Nor did the man in the convenience store who grabbed my crotch because just he could.

Instead I keep slamming my head against the same granite wall.

That's what it feels like.

My head against history and a man who will never see the construct.

We're getting worked up. We're going in circles. I know we'll get nowhere, but I won't let it go. There's an urgency here. A difference from our previous arguments about gender because this time, this time it directly involves me.

"So you're saying that a man can't ever ask a woman to dinner?" he asks.

"No, I'm not saying that."

"Yes you are."

“No I’m not.”

“Okay then, who do you think he’s going to ask out? The one whose biology you see more of.”

“So you’re saying it was my fault because I wore a bikini.”

“No, no I’m not.”

“Yes you are. If you take your position to the extreme, that’s what you’re saying.”

“Now you yourself said that you flirted with the neighbors.”

I stand up. I walk off. I go to the guest room where I sit on the bed that has my comforter from college on it, a comforter Joe might have slept on. I think about writing, about calling Jerry, about taking Dad’s Corvette and speeding down the interstate. 100 mph, that’s what I want. Then I think of a counter example and head back to the living room.

“What about a man in a Speedo and a man in a suit?” I say, as I stand in front of his chair. “If it’s about biology showing, then it dictates that the man in the Speedo will be chosen, but most often it’s the man in the suit that will attract women. Why’s that the case?”

“I don’t know. I can’t speak for women,” he says. “I’m saying that women *should* know that if they dress to be attractive—and that is what they are doing—then they should expect a man to make a pass at her.”

I guess Mom should have been wearing a burlap sack the night she stopped by the mall.

“It shouldn’t matter what type of dress a woman is wearing, she shouldn’t have to hear that her tits look great.”

“Why are you only considering the vulgar comments? A man shouldn’t make vulgar comments to a woman.”

“You have no idea what it feels like to be harassed for what you are wearing, and I’m sick of men thinking they’re entitled to comment on women’s bodies because of what they have on.”

“I don’t make vulgar comments, your brother doesn’t make them, I bet Jerry doesn’t make them, so would you say that we’re entitled?”

I bite my lip, take a breath, and say, “Yes, I agree that you don’t use vulgar language toward women but I don’t think you’re outside the patriarchy.”

“Patriarchy?! Now you’ve totally gone off. What are you talking about? Patriarchy? So you want matriarchy, then?”

He literally throws his hands up so they slap back down on the leather armrests.

“No, I want neither,” I say.

“Well if it isn’t patriarchy, then it’s matriarchy.”

“No, I don’t want a reversal of power and privilege. I want equality.”

“I feel sorry for you because you’re going to live an unhappy life.”

“Don’t, Dad. I see the world as gray and you want it to be black and white. This is why we will never see eye to eye on these things.”

“I have to do my breathing treatment,” he says, getting up from his chair and turning away.

I go back to the bedroom angry. Mom’s crystal boxes rest on the dresser, along with a picture of me and Dawson from when I was around two years old. I wind the rocking horse music box that I listened to as a child and want the Toyland back, *Toyland, toyland, little girl and boy land*, even though it tells me, *once you pass its borders, you can ne’er return again*. I call Jerry, who says, “I

feel sorry for your father” and “He said he was looking for signs, well, sleeping with your neighbor was the sign” and “I’m sorry, Baby.”

I write in my journal and try to sleep but all I do is rehash the argument. Disappointment. Shame. Blame. I rehear him say, “Outside of rape, a woman has the most power because she can say no.” I guess he really does think it’s my fault, even though he won’t see the connection between his examples and what happened to me.

The next morning, I leave early, taking the Vette to spend the day beside a lake, just to be anywhere other than with him in his home.

In the evening, I have dinner with Chris, a woman I met in my mid-twenties and who is around my father’s age. We sit across from each other in a dark booth in a dark room, the type of place with \$30 mediocre steaks.

“You were just a kid!” she says. “And they were grown men. It was rape,” she tells me again.

I tell her I don’t want to go back to Dad’s house, though I know the topic will never come up again, and that I can’t believe the conversation ended like it did, but really I can. It took the turn that was easiest for him—let’s talk about men and women and not about you.

“You need to eat your fish,” she says, knowing that I lose my appetite when I’m upset.

“I just don’t know how to reconcile the man who is a wonderful father, who defended Mom when someone said it was her fault, and the father who disregarded my pain last night,” I say. I move grains of rice around on my plate.

Maybe his anger toward me really was about power. He’s always seen his power as coming from his knowledge, not his

physical strength, he's admitted before that the parenting that worked with my brother never worked with me, so maybe I had, by virtue of being a young woman, emasculated him.

I say to Chris, "I just don't think he had any idea what to do with me when I was growing up."

"That's no excuse for thinking it's your fault," she says. She takes a sip of wine. "Maybe he can't accept it because then he'd have to admit to himself that he failed to protect you."

I don't know that she is right. But I want to hold onto this. I have to.

Though later I'll think maybe he could hate Mom's killers and not Kyle and Joe because he never saw my wounds. Or that when he watched me crying and shaking on his couch, he thought it was shame I felt.

I'll remember a time, a few years back, when he had said, "I've done things in my life that I'm definitely not proud of, but I will never tell you what they are." When I asked him why, he answered, "Because I don't want you to see me in that light."

I had told him, "It would make me love you even more, Dad, to know that you weren't perfect."

"I'll still never tell you," he had said.

Maybe I *had* wanted to get something off my chest. Maybe even without the writing, I would have been right there, in his kitchen and his living room, saying what my father was too terrified to say: *I want you to really know me, to see me for what I am.*