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Eric J. Kregel

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# She Shall Live On

by

Eric J. Kregel

The fuzzy, faded video image of Mari St. John looked deeply into the camera. The pale, balding woman grasped her bed sheets tightly. Closing her eyes, she swallowed a few times. She shook off the tears.

“Thandie, my love. I want to be with you always. I want to be there when you marry. I want to be there when you have your first birth. I want to be there when you grow old. Thandie, I can’t be. I just can’t. So the next best thing is that you will have this as a way for me to live on...”

A new voice spoke. It was a deep, television voice droning over the image. “This is a mother’s legacy. A mother, who did not let even cancer stop her love for her daughter.”

Mari’s image changed. She wore a pink shirt, had most of her hair, and was now sitting in her kitchen, staring at the video camera. “I plan to have a library of video messages. You shall watch a video messages of me throughout your life. That way, I can always be there with you. Some messages will be general. Some will be specific. They are here for you, so that your mother, I, will always be with you.”

The image of her seemed stronger, earlier in her stages of cancer. She still had her hair, the glow of her skin, and the energy

to deliver her distinct, St. John spunk that landed her the TV anchor job for City News based out of Calgary.

A polite, male voice continued his narration, “Since Mari St. John was diagnosed with terminal cancer, she videotaped herself for the sake of her 6 year old daughter, Thandie.”

Another image; this time Mari was outside in the snow. She looked over the snow blanketing their backyard. Mounds tackled the swing set and slide. She wore a wool cap, black jacket, and rubber boots. Face flushed from the cold, she looked deep into the camera, stating on cue, “Thandie, I shall live on.”

The newsman providing the narration now appeared, wandering through the streets of downtown Calgary. He looked into the camera, slowly striding towards the lens with confidence and sobriety. “As it was announced a week ago, Mari St. John passed away. She will be missed, here at City News. We will not forget her, keeping her legacy with us. Her daughter, as well, will never forget her and has a concrete connection to her mother’s legacy. Her daughter, Thandie, has now a videotaped memorial of her mother.”

The scene cut to a small, young girl.

Her face red with crying, the camera took up most of her face. "I will watch the tapes a lot because I miss my mother. It's like she's here with me."

The newsman returned, still facing the camera on the streets of Calgary. "A legacy given by a mother whose love would not end. Even in death. For Thandie, her mother lives on. Gerry Theroux, City News Calgary."

The image popped out of existence replaced by the harsh scream of static. The television muted. The remote control signaled the VCR to rewind the tape.

Randall climbed out of his worn, brown leather chair and lurched to a stand. He reached over to the lamp, turning it on. His living room filled with light, alerting him to the figure of a woman standing in the kitchen. He put on his glasses to find out who was there. Upon seeing the girl, he explained, "I was just--"

"Watching the old news broadcast about mom?" Thandie asked.

"Well, I wanted to see what was on the tape." Randall looked away from his daughter. "I didn't want to tape over anything...important." He laughed quietly to himself.

"Dad," Thandie said. "If it's a videotape in our house, it's probably one of mom."

"Probably. I guess I don't want to record something on an important tape." He drew his robe, tying it up. "When did you get home?"

"Not long." She walked to the other brown chair in the living room, pointing at the television that centered the room. "Breton walked me to the door and saw me in about five minutes ago."

Randall scratched the half circle of thinning hair connecting his ears together on top of his head. "Oh, did you have fun?" The click of the VCR sounded, signaling the end of the rewind cycle.

"Yes. We saw that new Space movie."

"Oh, I'm jealous. I used to be really into Sci-Fi."

"I know, you used to write it." His teenage daughter leaned close toward him, said, "I could see it again! We could watch it tomorrow, after you watch your church programs."

"Oh." He slunk away, moving his head away first and then his whole body. "Oh no. No. I hear its going to be below 0 tomorrow. Shouldn't go outside. Might get cold and that wouldn't be healthy."

"Of course it will be below 0 tomorrow. It's Alberta! Have you ever known Alberta to be warm?"

Randall allowed a bit of noise to come from his laugh. He pointed at his daughter. "That's good. That's something your mother, Mari, would say."

Upon hearing her dead mother's name, she rolled her eyes quickly to herself, as to not be caught by her father. "Dad, I..."

Randall reached for another tape and replaced it with the video in the player. He pressed play. Almost to his daughter, he said, "Let's watch another message from your mother."

Thandie shrugged and let the message begin.

Breton met his father at church, where he worked. His father wore his collar and suit, just returning from a funeral. Breton sat in his office, going through some of his books.

While he waited for his father, he scanned through the maps of the Holy Lands. Breton loved maps and dictionaries and any sort of reference books. He struggled in school to read actual stories or poems, but loved to research them. This is why he got high marks in school, especially in his English classes: he hated stories, but loved researching them. This love of research came out every time he was in his father's office, going through all of the Bible helps. He was asked by his teachers why he loved

non-fiction so much, to which he replied, "It feeds the fiction inside of my head." The teacher, nor the class, understood this statement and put it with all of the rest of Breton's cryptic comments in class.

His father, Kendrid, enjoyed watching his son tear through his books. He would joke, "It makes it look as if I actually research my homilies. He clears off all of my dust." When he entered his office, he found his son in a deep trance over a page concerning ancient Babylon.

"Son!" No response. Breton just stared. "Breton!"

Breton looked up with a sleepy look he wore through most of his adolescence. He mumbled, "Hey dad."

"So, to what do I owe this pleasure?"

"I was nearby. Thought I'd stop by."

"We live 15 kilometers away and it's snowing. And you don't drive, so you would have had to ride your bike. I don't think you were in the neighborhood. Something's on your mind." Breton gazed at his father with the same vigor the outside of a house stares at the neighborhood. He stared at his father until the silence could no longer be endured.

"So, how's that girl you've been seeing. Thandie?"

"Oh yeah. I've been meaning to ask you something about her."

Kendrid sat on the edge of his desk, relaxing. "Oh yes. What about?"

"Can you have dinner with her family tonight? I want to figure out something about her."

"What needs to be figured out? And why do you need me to be there while you figure it out?"

"I just do. I can't explain it. And I thought, well, maybe you could pick up what I'm seeing."

"Which is?"

"I don't know yet." He looked away from his father, staring at a globe in the corner of his father's room. "I like this girl.

I want to figure out something. Plus, we don't have any plans tonight."

Kendrid shrugged and nodded. For the rest of the late afternoon, Breton did his homework while his dad worked on the office. About 5:30, they drove over to Thandie's house for supper.

They found the St. John's home at the end of a cul de sac of one of Calgary's more wealthy neighborhoods, McKenzie Towne. Kendrid, the moment he saw the neighborhood and remembered the last name, yawned an exclamation of recognition, "Oh! Thandie's mom is Mari, the newscaster!"

Before they got any closer, Breton mumbled out of the corner of his mouth, "Was, dad. Was her mother. She died about 7 years ago."

"Yes, I remember now." Kendrid said, to no one in particular, "Another widowed husband, eh? We make great meals and lousy after-dinner chats. This should be, well, familiar."

They knocked at the door, waiting until the door swung open. Thandie greeted them. She giggled and bounced, full of raw, 17 year old energy. Her laughter infectious, Kendrid couldn't help smiling back at the girl.

"Well, hello! Welcome to our home," she said.

Breton mumbled, while looking away from everyone, "This is my dad."

"Hello, Breton's father!" She tried sounding official.

"Please, I'm just Kendrid."

"Not Father Kendrid or Pastor Kendrid?"

Kendrid chuckled, unsure why. "No. No one calls me those titles. I'm simply Kendrid. Even Breton calls me Kendrid. I'm allergic to titles."

She motioned for them to enter. They took off their shoes, coats, and hats, entering into the warmth of the home. Entering the

large home with high vaulted ceiling and a mammoth great room, Randall waddled out of the kitchen to greet them. A small man, constantly hunched to the right, he trumpeted a greeting from his small voice, "Well, hello there. I see they've arrived." He shook both of their hands. "Dinner is almost ready. Before we begin, we need to watch a video tape."

Randall led them to the living room, sitting them down in each a chair. The St. John's television was mounted on a wall full of cabinets. Randall opened the far right cabinet, revealing hundreds of private videotapes, all with the white stickers and words written by a dark pen. He found one and pulled it out delicately.

Kendrid joked, "So, I see you've got a lot of tapes. Is that for hockey or football?"

Randall tenderly put the video in the player and answered, "Oh no. I prefer not to watch sports. Mari doesn't like me to watch sports." He turned on the TV and VCR.

The image blipped to life. Mari St. John sat in a large, white swing chair, overlooking at beautiful spring day. Somehow, background music gently played giving an air of warmth and sincerity. Mari, in clothes she wore while giving a newscast, bounced, "Well, hello there! It is so good to meet you! I am Mari St. John, Thandie's mother. I understand that you are considering taking out my daughter. If this is true, than you are watching the right video section." The video faded into an image of her standing her garage.

"Here in our garage is our '96 Porsche. We purchased it when I won an award for excellence in journalism." She walked by a beautiful, cherry red Porsche. "This car is worth more than the last three of our previous cars combined. It took me a long time to save and plan for this purchase."

The camera cut in close to her face. "You would love to drive this car, wouldn't you? Most young people would. Say I,

without much thought, throw you the keys, without ever knowing you or learning to trust you? Foolish? Unwise? Of course. But how much more valuable is my daughter to me than just a sports car that's cool today and junk tomorrow."

The scene changed. Mari walked along a hillside, overlooking Olympic Park. "Thandie is very precious to me. I am her mother and a mother's love is a deep, mystical bond. I'm not there to approve or disapprove of you seeing my daughter, but I am here now, telling you that she must be cherished, honored, and protected. You must be a gentleman, whoever you are. Now I have left a questionnaire for you to fill out, which Randall will score. He's been coached as to what I look for. Please take this form home and return it the next time you see Thandie. I wish her luck on her new adventure with you." The tape ended.

Kendrid looked at his son, hoping to read any expression on his son's face. The boy sat, staring blankly at the screen.

"Dinner is ready," Randall said

Randall, after spending most of the meal hunched over his plate, asked Kendrid, "So, you live alone? I mean, you're not married?"

"Widowed. My wife, Breton's mother, died during childbirth." Kendrid was still working on his potatoes. His steak finished and carrots sucked up, his meal was now the starches. "Breton was her only child."

"Oh. I'm sorry to hear that," Randall said. "It must have been hard for you to raise your son alone."

Kendrid swallowed his potato, wiped his mouth with a cloth napkin, and smiled at his son. "Immensely. I mean, Breton was an easy baby, luckily. He even changed his own diapers." He looked around and discovered no one laughed at his attempted joke.

"Seriously, it was difficult. But we human beings are adaptive, learning how to survive

without certain things. We move on, we live on when people leave us. I miss my wife, Jane, but I wouldn't trade losing her for the world. It made me a lot more aware of Breton, a lot more aware of people in general. I use the illustration about someone who loses their eyesight and their sense of hearing is heightened. Losing my wife, my High School sweetheart, was-

"Mari died when Thandie was seven." Randall chirped this, cutting off Kendrid's musing. His tone was oddly inappropriate, curt in how matter-of-fact about his devastating loss. "Yes, she died of cancer. It was very difficult losing her. She did everything. I don't think I ever changed Thandie once. She brought Thandie everywhere, on all of her news stories. She read to Thandie and she did her news show. I cooked and cleaned, but only set to her instructions. She was very particular."

"It sounds like it was a hard transition."

"She made it easy. She videotaped herself for Thandie. If she hadn't, we would have lost her completely." Kendrid tried to make sense of that last statement: we would have lost her completely. How?, he wondered. She's dead, isn't that "completely"? How do you cut a percentage of life from death?

Kendrid shook this kind of thinking from his mind. He rose, striking the table of dishes.

"We saw one of those before dinner."

Clumsily, he pointed to his son.

"Remember?" Breton didn't move, staring at Thandie. "How many messages did she leave?"

"Oh, the catalog registers about 452 6 hour tapes and over 18,000 messages. Some are much longer than the one you got. Around the end, most of the messages are just her talking to the camera from the hospital bed. The one you saw was during the first couple months of her filming. She loved being in front of the camera and this

was her way of leaving something behind for Thandie.

"During her 11 month fight with cancer, she spent a lot of time on her messages. She would labor over these messages, often times skipping sleep or eating. She really took it up as a labor of love. For Thandie."

"And have you watched many of them?"

"We watch her messages every day.

With her face shining through the screen, she never has left us."

"Interesting." Kendrid remarked this mostly to himself.

In the car ride back to their home, Breton broke the silence by mumbling, "I don't know how to ask this, so I may ask this wrong."

"Ask and be wrong, son"

"Is Thandie weird?"

Is Thandie weird?, Kendrid thought to himself. I can see why my son would be attracted to her. Pretty, blond little girl. She got her looks from her mom, a television person. Television people, who are scarce in Alberta, are such strange people. They remind me of unicorns, gently prancing through someone's garden. They look like they don't belong in places like the suburbs or in grocery stores. But you see these television people, these magnificently beautiful people, and there they are.

Thandie's mom was a television person. And Thandie, for all purposes, looks just like one too.

Is Thandie weird? How can I explain to my son that grief does different things to different people? It's weird to have grief, on any level, so those who have it are weird. And our grief came out entirely different than Randall's grief. How can I explain this to a kid who's, well, fallen in love with a unicorn?

"Define weird, Breton."

The boy squirmed, already having a difficult time taking. "Well, she's forced to

watch a bunch of videotapes of her dead mother. That's weird, right?"

"It's weird to lose a mom. It shouldn't happen. So, yeah, she's weird."

"But she watches videos every night. She's done this for 10 years. That's weird."

My son isn't as dumb as he looks.

"Who turns on the tape? Is it her or her father?"

"I dunno. But she watches them. I like her but I'm worried. You know, all of that psychological stuff."

"I see. Well, what are you most comfortable with? Do you like her?"

"Yeah."

"Do you like spending time with her?"

"Yeah."

"Then spend time with her. Don't be like our Old Man and over-think this one."

"It's just weird."

"Yeah, it is. Just weird."

Mari looked into the camera, wondering if it was on. She nodded and began, "I have five rules concerning finding a spouse. These rules should be followed after High School. During the next eleven years, just date to have fun. Don't get a boyfriend. Only date someone you intend to marry and since you can't marry in High School, don't even bother. Just have fun with friends. As you have heard from my other recorded messages, I don't believe that girls should be exclusive to one man unless they intend to marry them. Courtship, my dear. Dating is dead, but courtship is a way where your father and I can be involved with your marital decisions."

Mari sat in her hospital bed, with most of her hair lost. She wore a pale blue paper gown, exposing her pale skin. Her eyes were crimson, with a faint hint of her once green eyes. She lost considerable weight, resembling a skeleton hanging in a science classroom.

"But if you find someone you want to commit your life to, make certain of 5 things.

1) **Marry those of your faith.** You have been raised as an Evangelical, Protestant Christian. If you want more information on your faith, consult tapes 111-151. I've seen too many relationships tear people when individuals try to marry outside of their tribe. 2) **Make sure he comes from a household with both parents.** A boy raised by divorced parents will only divorce you...more than likely. 3) **Does he have a purpose for his life?** What is he on Earth for? A man without a purpose should not be considered as a spouse. A man needs to know where he's and then who he's taking with him, not the other way around. 4) **Does he fit into your purpose?** In order to create your own life's purpose, see message 234 on tape 59. Finally, 5) **What does his father look like?** Not just how the father behaves, but what he actually looks like. Is he overweight? Is he bald? How does he dress? Look to the father to foresee what kind of man you shall marry."

She smiled. The message ended

Thandie wrapped her scarf around her face, tucking it into her wool cap. She zipped up her jacket and left for the cold, outside world of Canada. For the first few moments, the warmth of her house lingered around her, only to be replaced by the stinging, sharp cold air.

She left the walkway that wrapped around the side of the house, leading to the sidewalk. As she reached the sidewalk, she heard her name called out.

She turned around. A woman popped out of a white van. She wore a very nice jacket, full of fur and leather. She wore an awful lot of make-up, tipping Thandie off that she was involved, somehow, with Mari's media world.

"Excuse me, Thandie? Thandie St. John?"

Through the fabric of her scarf, she



responded, “Yes?”

The blond woman shivered. “I knew your mother, Mari. She was an inspiration to me. When I started at City News was when she was anchoring the news. She was a very dear person to me. We were thinking, back at the station, of doing a follow up story on her life.”

“Uh-huh.”

“Would it be possible if we could interview you? We want follow up on her plan, when she made all of the video messages for you. You know, see how they’ve helped you and raised you. Would it be possible if my camera man can take some shots with you and then we could do a—”

“I’m busy right now. I’m going to see a friend of mine. I don’t have time right now.”

“It will only take a few moments—”

“No, I don’t think so. Not now.” She took three steps backwards, away from the van.

“Then when? Could we come by tomorrow?”

“No. Busy then. Can’t.”

“When? You name the time. We’ll work around your schedule, I more than understand. A seventeen year old girl can be really busy.”

“I don’t do interviews.” She backed up two more steps. “I don’t like cameras. I can’t. I won’t. Sorry.”

The blond woman bit her lower lip. Her voice raised a bit. “Your mother inspired millions of women, not just in Canada but throughout the States. She taught many women how to be better mothers, take charge of their homes and lives. I think it would be unfair to these women not to show how her hard work has paid off.”

“I’m sorry, but I don’t want to talk about my mum.”

“But you have an obligation to women throughout the continent to tell her story.”

“Her story has already been told, plenty of times. I’m sorry, but I don’t...”

“Listen, quit thinking of yourself. Your mother’s story must live on...”

Thandie closed her eyes, turned, and ran away from the white van. The blond woman ran three steps after her and called her name out. Thandie paid no attention, running to Breton’s house. When she left the cul de sac, she stopped running.

Her head sunk down to her knees. She covered her face. In her private world, she cried.

Breton figured Thandie was tired that day. She spoke and was her usual, warm self. But something was different. He couldn’t put his finger on it, other than it was an off day. They spent the day reading old children’s books to each other. She giggled, he laughed. Something, somehow, was funny.

Everyone should be allowed to have an off day, he told himself, reminding himself more of his dad than anything else.

She ate dinner over at his house. Kendrid served cheese potatoes, some fish he caught near Vernon in BC, and some squash. During the meal, Kendrid made the kids laugh by mispronouncing one of their favorite bands. The laughter seemed to unleash a flood of laughs from Thandie, since she couldn’t stop. She turned red, hiding her face. The little girl, thin as a rail, looked as though she would be knocked over by the force of air from her laughs. But she didn’t. Instead, her heaves and snorts encouraged the two males to continue in their laughter.

When things settled, Kendrid wiped a tear from his eye and mentioned, “You’re quite good at laughing.”

“How so?” she inquired.

“It’s infectious. You find something funny, laugh, and the whole room wants to join you. It’s like some psychic power or

something.”

“Laughter?”

Kendrid burst a smile and admitted, “I know it sounds silly, but it’s a nice treat to hear some laugh with such skill. You’re, in the full sense of the word, a joy.”

Thandie crinkled her nose, trying to receive his compliment. Not sure what it meant or how to take it, she simply thanked him and continued in her meal.

After dinner, the kids went into what Kendrid called the front room. The front room’s main feature was the front door and, along with the front door, it was never really used. Beautiful furniture, nice pictures, and a collection of empty space and sound. Hanging over their antique couch, rested a painting of Breton’s mother.

Thandie discovered it, stepping back as if to take it in and treating it as if it hung in a museum. She whispered, “Is that her? Your mother?”

“Yeah, that was her.”

Thandie’s eyes drank in the picture of Breton’s mother, scanning side to side of the frame to capture every color and image. The painting was of her sitting in a chair, in front of a lush red curtain. She did not smile, but wore a stern expression. Not of anger, but more of strength and determination. She wore a jewel green dress, her hair tied tightly in a bun. She radiated Breton’s blue, almost white, eyes. Her hands were fists, readied on her lap.

“She was beautiful.”

Considering her comment, “Yeah, she was. She was twenty six when she had this painting done of her. It was a first year anniversary gift.”

“Ever miss her?”

Breton thought about that question, wearing a lost expression while thinking. Finally, he admitted, “I never knew her. She’s more of a story than a person. Dad will tell stories about her, but she’s kind of

like a character in those tales. You know, it’s like knowing Zorro or Superman: you know them, but you wouldn’t count them as family.”

“Was it tough for your father to lose her?”

“He says so. That’s some of his stories about her. You know, ‘like the one about losing my wife’. I know he loved her deeply, otherwise he wouldn’t tell stories about her. I guess that’s how my dad likes people: he tells stories about them.”

“Do you think he’ll ever tell a story about me?”

“Oh you? You laughing at the table is sure to be a story. Yeah, the more you’ll spend time with him, the more stories he’ll collect about you. My dad’s a real story teller.”

“My dad used to be a storyteller. Actually, he’s a published author. That was a while ago, before my mum died.”

“What happened to his stories?”

“If he needs to say something, he doesn’t tell a story anymore. Instead, we just watch a video of mum. She’s become his storytelling.”

“Videos, eh?” He said nothing, keeping in his thoughts. He changed his tone to lively one. “I sometimes have dreams about my mom. She’ll come out in my dreams, every once and a while.”

“How so?”

“She’ll show up when I have a dream about giving a speech or when I’m visiting the dentist or playing sports or when I’m doing some sort of adventure. Like one time I was on a boat, fighting against that mythological creature Kraken. Yeah, I was telling all of my crew members to sail closer to the monster. I held a spear.” He demonstrated his spear stance to her. “I was ready to hurl the thing, killing the monster and freeing the village of its control. I pulled back my spear. Aimed.” He cleared his throat and then relaxed his stance. “And my

dead mother comes aboard the ship at that moment.”

“What does she do?”

“She doesn’t do anything. She talks and tells me to do things.”

“Like what?”

“That I have to take the trash out or that the sidewalk needs salt because there’s new snow. She starts going through a whole list of things I have to do. And I want to tell her, ‘Mum, I’m killing mythological monsters, here. Plus, you’re dead.’”

They both laughed.

Thandie, in the midst of her laughter, squeaked, “I have dreams of my mother too.”

“Really?”

“I wake up in the middle of the night and I’m in my bed. I wander out of my bed, into the living room. She’s there. She looks scared, like something is going to kill all of us. She doesn’t hug me, we don’t talk, and she seems preoccupied. She takes me by the hand and leads me out. We go to the town’s indoor pool. She has the key, for some reason. She pushes me into the water. I don’t know why. She puts her powerful hands on my head, holding me under. And she tries to drown me.”

“Does she?”

“No. I wake up from the dream before she does. I have to wake up in order to get out of this dream.”

“So you’ve had this dream before, eh?”

She nodded. Silence followed. Great, she thought. I’ve now made him think I’m weird. She tried to salvage the evening. “It’s probably not the same as killing Krakens.”

Breton mumbled with a smile, “We all have our Krakens

Thank you, Breton. Thanks for saying that.

Thandie returned home later than she ought to. She slipped into the dark house,

hoping to make her way to her room undetected. She walked past the living room, into the hallway, and passed the bathroom...

Randall flipped on the bedroom light, banishing the darkness. Thandie felt like she was caught in a spot light, the world circling around her. Randall droned, “Thandie?”

Thandie jumped. Her father walked slowly to her, every step becoming more and more surrounded by the light. “Thandie, it’s later than 9 pm. We have rules. Rules your mother gave us.”

“I know father. I lost track of time and...”

“Your mother and I said 9 pm. 9 pm. You’re forty-five minutes late. Why?”

“I was out with Breton and we lost track of time. I’m sorry, truly I am. I’m willing to take whatever consequence you decide, father. It was wrong of me to be out late and it was inconsiderate.”

If I beat him to the punch, maybe he might just punish me and be done with it, Thandie reasoned. It was wrong of me being out so late. I’m willing to admit it and change. If he can just see that, then maybe that will be it.

“I appreciate your spirit, Thandie. That is making this a lot easier.”

“I ask for your forgiveness, father. I am sorry for being out late.” Please, let that be all of it. Ground me. Forbid me to see Breton for a couple of weeks. Take away the television. Don’t bring mom into this.

“However, I don’t think you see the bigger picture,” Randall began. “There’s a big concept that is being overlooked.”

“You’re probably right. I just saw myself being late and forgetting the time. If there is something worse that I did, please let me know.” That didn’t sound sarcastic, did it? I’ve got to sound sincere. Be sincere. That’s the only way I can get through this.

“The big picture can’t be explained by me, but by your mother.” Oh dear God, no.

Don't pull out the tape. "Your mother understood that these kinds of things would happen. Luckily, she's recorded some messages for you. Now, I don't want to show this tape to you because she gets cross. But I think it's important."

"Father, I think it would be best if I just was punished like a normal kid and..."  
Thandie, what did you say? Don't go there. Now we'll be up all night. Shouldn't have said it. You were scared, angry. Certainly. But don't ever compare yourself with 'normal' families.

Randall's eyes widened, stretching the skin of his face past its elasticity. His mouth gaped open. In a voice pregnant with drama, he moaned, "We are not normal. We will never be normal again. We have lost our mother, my wife. We will never be usual, normal again." He pointed at this daughter. "I think you need to see a couple of videos tonight."

Thandie heard herself before she felt herself scream at her father. She didn't even feel herself getting mad, but some switch was thrown. She yelled, "No more videos! No more recorded messages! I can't take it anymore!"

Randall stepped away for a second. He closed his eyes, moving his face away from his daughter. He collected himself. In a warm, reasonable voice, he related, "I know it's late and you're tired. I know you don't mean that. I know you love your mother and you regret saying those things."

I'm crying. Who is this girl doing all of the speaking for me? I yelled at my father, I'm in tears, and now I'm telling him what I think of those stupid videos of mum. What is going on with me? Who's running the controls?

Thandie mumbled, while looking away from Randall, "Maybe."

Randall moved closer to her daughter. His face without emotion, with the exception of his brows slightly raised. Speaking

through a small slit in between his teeth, he growled, "You love your mother, right?"

Don't say anything else, Thandie. Nothing else. Turn around and go to bed. Turn around. Stop what you're doing.

She met her father with the same poker face, eyes deep into his. "Maybe I don't want to see another video."

She turned around and entered her bedroom, closing the door on her father.

Randall didn't sleep that night. He wanted to go into Thandie's room, yell at her, scream, and force her to sleep outside. The moment the idea of forcing her to sleep outside in the Canadian snow crossed his mind, he knew that he wasn't thinking straight.

Never discipline Thandie when you're angry, Randall remembered Mari telling him. He knew that if he tried to talk to her anymore tonight, he would say things that he would regret. Better sleep on it, calm down, and deal with her in the morning. Don't try to solve anything when you're this mad.

Never discipline a child when you're angry. When do you discipline a child, Randall mused. When you're happy? When you've awoken from a nap, you hear the birds chirp, and you're feeling at peace with your world?

Randall shook off this line of thought. He knew he was too angry to try to be the reasonable one in the relationship. Thandie, in his mind, had disrespected him and his late wife, that was all there was to it. She would have to be punished, he reasoned. And someone in the house had to be the one making sense, so it might as well be the parent. I shall be nice to her tomorrow and then bring up what she did when she's calm, reasonable.

Randall sat in his bed in the darkness of his room. He still slept in a Queen sized mattress, fearing the smallness of other practically sized beds. It was the bed he had

been given as a wedding gift by Mari's sister. This bed would remain, along with the memory of Mari.

A memory flashed in his mind. He sat in a hospital room, watching Mari sleep. She had lost most of her hair. They had finished the last round of Chemotherapy and she had gotten really sick. They decided to keep an eye on her while her body struggle with the last dosage of radiation. He remembered that was the last round of radiation, before the doctors decided that the cancer would not go away and would slowly gain control of Mari.

He slept that night in the bed with her. When they were awake, they planned their next vacation. Still hopeful at that point.

Mari woke up quickly, rising quickly out of her bed. Randall cautioned her not to move to quickly since she was connected to a bunch of monitors and an IV.

Mari smiled at his fuss. She leaned back in her bed and moaned, "I think I need to make some more videos for Thandie."

"I thought we decided we weren't going to do that," he said. "Your therapist suggested that was hurting your focus on the present. Remember, he said that if spent all of this time getting ready for your death and you end up surviving-

"I had a dream. I'm not going to survive." She said this plainly.

Randall wanted a bit more. He leaned toward her, asking, "How do you know? From a dream?"

"I just do. And my videos are more important now than they've ever been. I must document everything so that our daughter can get through this time of grief with minimal damage." She spoke faster. "These things can destroy children, Ran. They can totally wipe them out. This cancer, this thing killing me, is my issue, not hers. She shouldn't have to suffer because of my sickness. And she won't. She will still be raised by her mother; she will still be a

healthy, normal girl. I will be with her in her life. I will live on." She shook when she spoke. Her eyes narrowed. "We will beat this. Death will not ruin my daughter. We will still be a healthy family, despite my death." Randall reached out, to place his hand on his wife. "She will have a video for everything. She will not be alone for anything. We will work around the clock, for her to have everything she can have." Randall pressed down on her shoulder as she tried to rise, becoming more and more excited. "This is for her. My love for my daughter won't be defeated by cancer." Her eyes fixed past her husband, she continued to speak in a quick, desperate voice. "Damn it, this cancer won't take away our relationship! It can't! I love her, Randall! I will be her mother! She won't be alone! Damn it, she won't be alone!"

Mari started to shake, tears growing and rolling out of her eyes. As she cried, she coughed and gargled. Randall rubbed his wife's shoulder. Randall used most of his strength to swallow. His hand reaching, he froze in a lurch extending to his wife. Mari covered her face as it winced and tightened.

She sobbed for minutes.

As the cries settled, she asked Randall in a small, broken voice, "I'm not being selfish, am I? This isn't weird. I want to help Thandie, not ruin things for her. I'm not being weird and selfish?"

Randall whispered, "You are someone who has never had a selfish thought her life. Everything you have ever done has been for Thandie. This is no exception."

"But it's weird, isn't it? Having a bunch of videos of your dead mother."

"Cancer is weird. Cancer is something that shouldn't happen, but does. If anything, us being here instead of our home in Calgary is weird."

"Promise me one thing: promise me that she will watch the videos. I've lived most of my life in front of the camera. Having a

camera pointed at me is part of my setting, part of who am. But I allow myself to be taped because I have always believed someone will be watching on the other end. Make sure that happens. Make sure Thandie will see her mother. I can't have peace unless I know that I won't only be recorded, but watched. Make sure she sees me, Randall."

That's Mari, he thought. That's the woman I've always known. That's the woman I married. The journalist, the television personality. She couldn't stand not being recorded.

Randall swallowed again. It went down harder this time.

"I promise. I promise that there won't be a day that goes by in which Thandie won't be spoken to by her mother."

Randall remembered his wife in the bed, nodding to him. He still had the image of her face while he sat on the bed.

In the darkness of his lone bedroom, he wept next to Mari's picture over the bed. Breton walked Thandie home, after school. He knew she was bothered, simply because she didn't talk about it nor about anything else.

When he got to her doorstep, he shrugged and exhaled, "I'll see you later. Okay?"

"Okay." She turned and left to go inside.

When she got inside, she found her father cleaning the book case of her mother's videos. She sat down in the living room, without making a sound, watching him. Her arms crossed, she waited for her father to turn around and notice her.

It took a while. Randall was in a deep focus, wiping clean any dust particles that collected on the videos. His brow furled, his attention steady. He looked as if he was operating rather than cleaning.

Thandie shut her eyes tightly upon seeing her father. She shook her head to

herself, opened them, and cleared her throat.

"Oh! Thandie! Welcome home!" Randall said. He looked so happy. Such a plastic happiness, Thandie thought.

Thandie didn't respond. Instead, she sat and stared at him.

Randall looked slowly to the left, as if to catch something or someone Thandie was staring at sourly other than him. After a spell, he asked, "Yes?"

"I want you to play one of mom's tapes."

Randall shot her a bright smile, turning in an almost a dance. "Yes, my dear. Which is it?"

"Play the one where she explains who I should go to when her library doesn't have a response for any of our issues."

He turned to see his little girl. "Excuse me?"

"In the event that I have a question to which she hasn't answered, whom do I go to for answers? Where can I go when her library of answers can't give me the advice I need?"

Randall put his fingers near his chin. He froze in thought a few moments, until he fingered the air suggesting he had an idea. He grabbed the master video list, recording all of the entries she had made for Thandie. After searching through the list two times, he looked up and admitted, "She doesn't have an entry answering that question."

Without emotion, Thandie said, "Good. If mom's video library is silent on this issue, I want to ask you, dad: who do I go to when mom's library isn't enough?"

A quick flash of terror lighted Randall's face. He quickly hid it, replacing his expression with confidence. "I'm sure there's a tape or message that Mari had recorded about this. Maybe if I look...I'm sure...Absolutely sure..."

"There isn't, dad. She has made no entries about. She has made entries about cooking, cleaning, dating boys, how to dress,

where to go to church, and how to balance a checkbook. But there's nothing on using other people to get advice. So now I will ask you, dad, where do I go when mom's library isn't enough?"

"I can't answer this question...maybe it's part of the entry about church...yes, she would say something about that..."

"She doesn't. It's missing from her entries. So, I turn to you: who do I go to when her library isn't enough?"

Randall's confidence dissolved. He searched the notepad frantically. His mouth moved rapidly, sounding out words and phrases that meant nothing. His right hand shook.

"I'm s-sure there's something here. She wouldn't have left a hole. It's too big. The library is too big for an omission. It must be here." He fumbled through the pages.

"She did not leave any message. So now I ask you, dad."

"Of course she won't cover everything, but this, you would think, should be here."

"It isn't. Not her fault. I'm not mad her. But I ask you: let me know, on this important question, what you think? Give me a piece of advice that has not been recorded by mum."

He threw down the list. "I can't! I can't do this without your mother!" Randall turned crimson, shaking.

She rose, meeting his anger with an equal level of anger. "You have been for seven years! You have raised me, parented me, and supported me for seven years without her! She has been dead for seven years! You have been the one that has been here without her!"

"That's not true! The tapes! The tapes have her, telling us what to do!"

"They don't work! You do! She is not my parent! She's just a recording!"

"That's your mother! Don't you dare..."

"My mother is gone! She is dead!"

Thandie was shaking, wanted to hit someone or something. Her stomach shook. Her fingertips tingled. She couldn't stop herself from yelling. "I wish mother had the good sense to die like everyone else instead of doing what she did! I wish she left us alone!"

Randall made a fist and recoiled back. His eyes on fire, he stared down at his daughter. Before he could follow through on his strike, he screamed, "Get the Hell in your room!" His fist made a point, commanding her to leave.

Thandie left her father. She did not leave her room for the rest of the day and night.

A dark, almost blue light glowed in Thandie's room when she woke up. Her eyes opened slowly, drinking in the squares and hues of her room. She lifted her head, feeling a sharp, shooting pain in the right side of her neck. She clutched her neck, rubbing it to work out the pain.

I fell asleep, she told herself. Fallen asleep sitting cross-legged, I must have been twisted like this for hours. She straightened her back. No, just my neck is in pain.

She looked to her clock radio. 2:32 am. Was I asleep that long? I guess so.

Thandie left her father, did her homework, ate some fruit she had in her room, and started writing in her journal. When the sun set she fell asleep. During that time, she heard no noise from outside her door.

At first, I didn't want to see my father. But now, since it's been 11 hours since our fight, I wonder if he's all right. Probably asleep. Still, I just want to check up on him.

She rose to her feet. Still in her clothes from school, with the exception of her boots, she slowly walked to her door. Creeping under her door shone a light. However, it

was not the light that normally came from the kitchen or even the television set. Dark blue, yet brighter than anything coming from under her doorway.

She opened the door slowly, waiting for it to be completely open soundlessly before she stepped through. She took a careful step onto the hall runner that stretched across the hallway. Carefully, she put her weight on her foot in order to make no creak or bend. Placing her other foot on the runner, she shuffled into a silent pace down to the living room.

The strange light came from her living room. Rather than going to her father's room to see if he was asleep, she decided to first investigate the living room. As she walked closer and closer to the living room, the dark-blue light became more alien than she had originally suspected.

She came into the kitchen with the first glance of the living room. Standing on every chair, every surface, and every bookcase rested television and DVD/VCR sets. All flashing, blinking, and glowing with different programs. None of these televisions belonged to them. All from different periods of times and styles. All faced different directions, aimlessly broadcasting around the room to no one in particular.

And standing in the center of the room was Mari St. John, looking as healthy as her first broadcast to her daughter.

Mari spotted Thandie. Before the emotion flooded from Thandie is seeing her dead mother alive, Mari said, "Your father is the only one asleep, dreaming. You are very much awake and I am here in every sense of reality. I've been sent here on a mission."

Thandie stared at her dead mother, full of life and breadth and standing in her living room.

My mother is alive, she thought. Talking to me. Telling me it's not a dream. And any moment, I'm going to freak out.

"Go on." Thandie said as calmly as she could deliver.

"Thandie, do you believe in the after-life?" Mari asked.

"Only at church." Don't freak out, don't freak out....

"Well this isn't church and I am here. But only for a short time. I'm on a mission."

"What is your mission?" It feels real and not a dream. But some dreams feel real. What's going on? Why can't this be a dream where weird things happen and I just accept it? I'm full of fear and common sense: two horrible things in a dream.

"I've been given a chance to do one visit and do one thing while I'm here on Earth. I chose to come back home and erase all of my videos. My request was granted, so I'm here now to take care of all of these videos."

"And what about dad?" Not only is she making sense, her visit makes sense. How can this be? How can I have a reasonable conversation with my dead mother?

"He won't be awake for any of this. He'll be asleep while we erase these tapes, during which he'll have a dream explaining what is going on. Next morning, he will be rested and at peace with these tapes being gone."

"And me? Why do I get to see you do all of this?"

"I need your help. And it was decided that you should be a part of the process."

"And why are we erasing all of the tapes you, at one time, thought was so important?"

Mari walked out of the living room and into the kitchen. "When I made those tapes, I was afraid to die. That Randall's wife would die. That my parenting would die." She opened the refrigerator, pulling out a cold can of pop. She popped open the can. "And through the last seven years, I've seen what those tapes have done. They've turned me into a ghost, haunting everything in this house. I don't believe in ghosts, Thandie. Even now that I'm dead, I don't believe in



ghosts.” She took a sip and quickly winced. “Oh, that’s horrible! Why did I ever think I’d like the taste of pop again?”

“So, you’re not a ghost?” She walked over to her dead mother. “What are you?” She touched her mother, feeling the fabric of her pink shirt. It felt real.

“I’m on loan. There’s a difference.” She took another sip, just to see if she was right the first time. She winced in displeasure. “Maybe there isn’t, I just don’t like the term ‘ghost’. I mean, they haunt and terrorize. I’m here to liberate.” She walked back to the television sets in the living room. She pressed a record button on one of the television sets. “Now, we have a job to do and erase my image.”

“And erase our memories of you?”

Mari only laughed. She faced her daughter, smiling.

I had forgotten that smile. My mom’s smile! That’s right, before cancer and her death and everything, she used to smile at me. Half smile, half smirk. And ended her smiles with her wrinkling her nose, making the smile more of an event than an expression. Why hadn’t she recorded that on the videos? She never smiled, laughed, or chuckled on her videos.

“Oh, keep your memories. Let’s just erase the tapes.” She playfully messed up her daughter’s hair.

“And so you propose to erase all of these videos?”

“I think you need that opportunity to go on a date without playing a video of me before and after your date.”

“So, you want to take away the experience of having all of my dates meet my dead mother?” Her tone serious, she stood with her hands on her hips. Mari stared back at her daughter. Mari, equally adamant, wore a stern, motherly expression. And laughed, ending with a nose crinkle. Thandie’s stance broke, erupting in laughter. “I hated that. I hated showing videos of

you...”

“They weren’t me! It was a ghost of me. I’m me. This is me. The real me.”

“But you’re dead,” Thandie said with a smile. “How can you be dead and here?”

“I’m on loan.”

“You said that already. How can you be on loan? From whom?”

“Come, help me erase these tapes.”

Randall turned over to his left side, awakened from his sleep by the unexplained notion that he was not alone in his dark bedroom.

He heard Mari’s voice call out from the far corner of their bedroom. “You’re now sleeping in the center of the bed. That’s good,” she said.

Randall woke up slowly, feeling okay about the idea of his wife’s ghost talking to him in the middle of the night. Just as he couldn’t explain why he woke up with the sensation of no longer being alone, he felt that it was right, at that particular moment, for Mari to be there.

“It took a couple of years and a really bad cold to get me in the center,” Randall said in a croak. “I’m sorry. I should roll back to my side of the bed.”

“Please, stay there,” she said as she sat at the end of the bed. “It makes me happy to see you where you are.” He lifted his head up and saw her familiar shadow. “I came here on a mission. While we’re talking, I’m also with our daughter Thandie as part of this mission.”

“How can you be here and also with Thandie at the same time?” He now was sitting completely up, his eyes able to focus on Mari with enough clarity to see her smiling at him.

“Randall, you’re talking to me, Mari. Mari, who died and shouldn’t be here. You believe that this isn’t a dream or some kind of hallucination, don’t you?” He nodded slowly. “So why quibble how I can be in

two places at once?" She laughed, gently shaking the whole bed. "Randall, I'm on a mission. I've been sent to erase all those video tapes in your 'Mari Library'."

"No," Randall said in a small, mousy voice. "Thandie needs those. She can't forget what you look like or your words. We've got to leave those, keep those for her. She really needs them."

"Randall," Mari said in a near, playful coo. "Is Thandie the one who really needs them? Is she really the one who can't let go?"

"Okay." His voice was quiet as he shrugged. A devouring emptiness started to grow in his stomach as he said the next set of words. "I need them. Mari, I'm scared. I can't raise her without you."

"You already have been raising her without me, Randall," the ghost said to her husband who was sitting in the center of the bed.

"I'm scared, Mari."

"I want you to think about what you've just said and what's exactly happening tonight: you're telling the ghost of your departed wife you're scared. Doesn't that strike you as a little odd?"

"But it's the truth. I'm scared that you'll stop being a part of our lives."

"So you saw me when I lied on my spelling test?" Thandie asked.

"I not only saw you make a forgery of your father's handwriting in crayon, but I could read your mind. And I knew his. Randall pretended to be furious, but he still keeps the F- test with his fake signature on it."

Thandie gobbled up more cold cereal. Thandie leaned against some pillows, forming a small nest on the floor. Mari had made a similar nest next to a tall wall of television sets. Both girls on the floor, both laughing, both erasing tapes.

"Where I'm living now," Mari stated. "We can see what people think, feel, and want. It's funny that all of the things people try to keep secret here or even lie about are common knowledge where I live."

"Which is?"

"Sorry, can't tell you. Don't you have the law of the prophets and the miracles of former ages?"

"Excuse me?" Thandie barked.

"Can't help you. Everything about where I live now has been revealed here on Earth: it's community access."

Thandie, changing the subject without permission and abruptly, said, "I love sitting on the floor. Dad never lets me sit on the floor. He told me that you were against it."

"Liar! He always got mad at me for sitting on the floor. He loved his furniture and felt it 'undignified' to sit on the floor. He's so British!"

"Dad's British?"

"Oh, we're not French. His folks came here from England. He never told you about that?"

"Never. He doesn't talk much about himself."

"He doesn't talk much. That used to not be the case." Mari reached, out of habit, for some nuts in a bowl nearby. She stopped herself, remembering what they tasted like. "I'm afraid he didn't take the loss of his wife well. At times, I used to doubt his love. Now that idea is so far from the truth. He always loved me and still does." She looked at the remaining tapes needing to be erased. "I wish love was enough to make someone happy."

"She's turning out to be an amazing young woman," Mari said to her husband who had stopped crying in the darkness of his bed.

Randall cleared his throat and regained the strength to his voice. "I miss talking to

you, Mari. I wish you didn't have to go."

"I'm already gone, Randall. What you're experiencing now is the last echo of a voice long since ceased." A pause followed and she broke it by laughing. "You really don't know what I've just said, do you?"

"How much longer do we have before you go again?"

"Minutes. Seconds possibly. Not long." She reached out and grabbed his ankle through the bed sheets and blanket. "I want to give you a last word."

"True to yourself, even as a ghost: you've got to leave the last word."

She was quiet as if she was mustering strength for the word. "Enough," she said.

"Enough? Okay, you've made your point. I won't show any more videos or be weird or—"

"That's not what I mean. You are enough. You have to be enough, for Thandie. Dying taught me that no love is bigger than when one person says to another, 'Enough'."

"Enough?" Randall said, trying on the word for size. "Enough."

"Enough," was the last word said by Mari to Randall.

The sun peaked over the tops of the house next door, spilling over the southern skyline. The last tape recording a morning news show over Mari's last message.

"This is the last tape. I'm here on contract. As soon as it's finished erasing and re-recording, I'm done here on Earth. I go back."

"To where?"

Mari laughed. "Somewhere that's given me a fresh perspective on things. A place that's full of what's important and doesn't waste time in what's not. You'll like it, Thandie. I really believe you'll fit in well. Already, you act in a lot of ways like someone who lives where I live." She

leaned in, speaking through her teeth.

"That's a compliment."

Thandie's red eyes burned. She looked through only slits, as her eyes' sleep circles compounded. She asked in a moan, "So, any parting words?"

"You mean like my last video message? I'm through, Thandie. It was a good thing gone wrong and I..."

"No video message. Just something for me to remember you by."

She reached out to her daughter's hands. She grabbed them tightly. It had been years since Thandie's hands were held by her mother. It reminded her of the days she'd go shopping and her mother didn't want her to get lost. Whispering, she commanded, "Be Thandie. Simply put, be Thandie St. John. Don't be anymore than Thandie nor any less. You are quickly becoming less of my child and more of your own: journey to that end. I've seen the end result, Thandie, and I know it's something to look forward to. Be Thandie."

"Is that it?"

"That's quite a lot! And it's enough for me to say. The rest is up to you." Mari looked at her daughter, who had the appearance of running a marathon. She belted an exhale and then giggled. "It's been years since I've seen exhaustion."

"Well, you're seeing it right now."

Mari announced to Thandie while she yawned, "I hate to remind you, but as soon as this is done I'm gone. Everything will be restored to normal except the library."

"Will I see you again?"

"Like this? No. But you will see me again."

Thandie looked away, her eyes starting to shine from tears.

Mari slightly smiled. "That's the first time you cried over my death. Do you realize that? You never grieved, never..."

"I was told you never left. That we have you in our video library. That you live on."

“Lies. Lies told out of love and fear.” Mari shook. Her eyes glistened along with her daughter. “It’s been such a long time since I’ve cried. There are no tears where I live.” She looked up, away from her daughter. “I wanted to guard your memory of me, so I videotaped myself. By losing that testament of myself, I ended up...”  
“Giving me a better memory of...”  
The tape stopped. And she was gone.

Two weeks later, Thandie and Randall were sitting in the somewhat warm, Calgary sun while Breton put four hearty steaks on the BBQ. They shifted on the cold wood of the backyard’s picnic table and bench. Kendrid sat in a small fold-up chair just hovering above the ground, drinking his pop.

Kendrid chirped, “I’ve been offered a chance to stay at a friend’s cabin up north, around Jasper. It would be for a weekend. I haven’t used much of my vacation time, so I’m free to go whenever. I was wondering, would you two like to come? There are plenty of rooms in the cabin and we can keep the kids separated.”

Randall looked up, scratching his head. “I’d really like to go...I think it would be fun...I’m getting busy again with writing...I think so. Sure. Give me a date and I’ll work around it.” He added, “I’ve never seen

Jasper.”

“Never seen Jasper! It’s an amazing place. Kind of makes you proud it’s in your province.”

Thandie got up and walked over to Breton hovering over the BBQ. The sun shone in Spring as they watched the days get longer, the air get warmer. Breton wore his staple facial expression: mouth open, eyes wide enough just to see through, and his head bobbing from thought to thought.

Thandie asked, “How’s it going?”

“I’ve burned everything. I’m flipping over some on their raw sides, but I’ve ruined our dinner.” He snorted. “You’re going to have to put up with a meal that sucks. Sorry.”

“I think we can do that.”

Breton remarked, “Your dad’s like a new person. He’s funny, relaxed, and carries on conversations. What happened?”

“I don’t know. I know certain things happened, but I don’t know the whole story.” She left it at that, allowing the silence to explain what she couldn’t.

“Good things?”

“Wonderful things.” She put her arm around him.

Breton shrugged. He mumbled, “It’s good. All of it’s good. I guess it’s what we do to live on. Move on. Live on. You know, grow up and stuff.” Thandie nodded.

The End