



1

The ugliest truth, a friend once told Myron, is still better than the prettiest of lies.

Myron thought about that now as he looked down at his father in the hospital bed. He flashed back sixteen years, to the last time he had lied to his father, the lie that caused so much heartbreak and devastation, a lie that started a tragic ripple that, finally, disastrously, would end here.

His father's eyes remained closed, his breathing raspy and uneven. Tubes seemed to snake out from everywhere. Myron stared down at his father's forearm. He remembered as a child visiting his dad in that Newark warehouse, the way his father sat at his oversized desk, his sleeves rolled up. The forearm had been powerful enough back then to strain the fabric, making the cuff work tourniquet-like against the muscle. Now the muscle looked spongy,

deflated by age. The barrel chest that had made Myron feel so safe was still there, but it had grown brittle, as though a hand pressing down could snap the rib cage like dried twigs. His father's unshaven face had gray splotches instead of his customary five o'clock shadow, the skin around his chin loose, sagging down like a cloak one size too big.

Myron's mother—Al Bolitar's wife for the past forty-three years—sat next to the bed. Her hand, shaking with Parkinson's, held his. She too looked shockingly frail. In her youth, his mother had been an early feminist, burning her bra with Gloria Steinem, wearing T-shirts that read stuff like "A Woman's Place Is in the House . . . and Senate." Now, here they both were, Ellen and Al Bolitar ("We're El-Al," Mom always joked, "like the Israeli airline") ravaged by age, hanging on, luckier by far than the vast majority of aging lovers—and yet this was what luck looked like in the end.

God has some sense of humor.

"So," Mom said to Myron in a low voice. "We agree?"

Myron did not reply. The prettiest of lies versus the ugliest truth. Myron should have learned his lesson back then, sixteen years ago, with that last lie to this great man he loved like no other. But, no, it wasn't so simple. The ugliest truth could be devastating. It could rock a world.

Or even kill.

So as his father's eyes fluttered open, as this man Myron treasured like no other looked up at his oldest son with pleading, almost childlike confusion, Myron looked at his mother and slowly nodded. Then he bit back the tears and prepared to tell his father one final lie.

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