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## The Lesson

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## The Lesson

*Jared Miranda*

I so wanted to thank him but I didn't know what for.  
His tireless efforts had gone unacknowledged for much too long.  
He sacrificed his autonomy, his will, and his integrity, but for what?  
I knew not.

It was not until the innocent age of twelve that I realized  
what he had gone through.  
I wanted to ask him to stop, but I didn't know how.

I watched him come home from work; he would fall back on the couch,  
close his eyes, and fall asleep  
In front of the scintillating pixels of the broken television.  
Knowing full well that he had but four hours to rest  
before he had to take the night shift at the local gas station.

By the time I was 17, my father was no longer the caring man  
That he once had been.  
He never spoke. He still spent every waking hour working,  
working overtime, holidays, and nights.  
His face now had a permanent frown,  
his eyes forever fixed on some immobile object in the distance.

When I was accepted to college, he took a job as a custodian at the university  
to help pay for my tuition.  
I graduated college ahead of time, and by the age of 23,  
I was settled in a modest job at a prominent corporation.

I was called out of work one day, and rushed to my father's deathbed.  
He looked into my eyes for the first time since I was 12,  
and asked that I take care of myself. In tears I asked him why he had put  
himself through all he did, why he had wasted his life  
for something he would never see.  
He pulled me close and in a rough, wispy voice told me that  
he never once thought he had wasted his life because he had given it to me.  
With that he winced, took a quick, short breath, loosened his grip,  
closed his eyes, and fell gently back onto his pillow.

Years later, when my wife had just delivered our first child,  
the nurse picked up my child and set him in my arms  
The infant turned his head and looked at me. I looked down at him,  
and I was instantly overcome with tears of joy and appreciation,  
as I finally understood why my father had done  
what only a parent can.