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On Magic
498 words

As a kid, I didn't believe much in magic. I thought magicians were frauds and puppets were, well, puppets. I was even cynical about Santa. Not just because I'm Jewish, mind you, but because I could not understand how he could be in his house outside the local Deli while at the same time courting children at his castle in the mall.

As a young adult, I remained cynical; refusing to believe in UFOs, Bigfoot, ghosts, or food items that supposedly contained the face of Jesus. Rather, I believed there was a scientific explanation for everything. Perhaps this is because my father is a doctor, trained as a general practitioner first, then a psychiatrist. For a long time, I believed he could cure anything. All my father needed was a quick consult with his *Merck Manual of Medical Disorders*, and the right drug, and everything would be OK.

This is what I believed, at least, until my mother's illness. Just weeks after the terrorist attacks of September 11, she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Like the fall of the towers themselves, everything I believed about my parents up to this point would now begin to crumble. My mother would not live forever and my father, rather than being the great healer I had imagined, would be revealed as only human.

This is when I started changing my tune about magic.

My mother died on August 26, 2002, nine months after her cancer diagnosis. That morning, I awoke to a commotion of unusually noisy birds outside my childhood bedroom window, followed by tense voices coming from downstairs. I put on my robe and went to the kitchen, where I found my father and sisters surrounding the green refrigerator that had been with our family since I was born. It was pulled away from the wall, its contents emptied, a brown liquid trickling from its insides.

"It died," one of my sisters said, throwing a towel at me to help clean up.

The timing was uncanny I thought, this symbol of nourishment dying the same day as my mother. When I pointed this out to my father later, he said simply, "She hated that old thing."

"But what about the birds?" I asked him.

He looked annoyed. "What birds?"

"Didn't you hear them this morning – they were so loud outside my window. Don't you think that meant something?"

"Nah," he said, disappearing behind a cloud of pipe smoke. "They're always noisy."

I returned to my apartment in Boston soon after the funeral. My father called almost immediately, wanting to talk about a bird.

"It won't go away," he said, nearly giddy. "It lingers on the fence and watches me whenever I'm outside." I knew what he was thinking.

Call it synchronicity, call it coincidence, call it overanalyzing—as my therapist once did. But if you notice something unusual that brings comfort or meaning to your life, why question it? These days I look for magic wherever I can find it.