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The Shadow of my Childhood
By Katie Oswald

My father— he was a redwood.
He was closer to the sun.

Strong and tall, he towered over
my childhood— shaped me.

Showed me which way to point my leaves
and how to soak in the sun.

He was a redwood.
He even hiked among them,

in my mind's eye
I can still see him—

There in the mountains
with the Redwoods.

I would chase him
and he would pretend I was faster

and we would laugh
and I would find the sun,

because— he was a redwood and
he was closer to the sun.

A ray of life
in a dark world

always there—
dependable and strong.

A good man.
A good father.

He towered over my childhood,
an unchanging redwood,

always there—
and I knew with a

child's certainty that he
always would be.

But then he wasn't.

Because things changed.
He got sick—

and then sicker,
the doctors grew more serious

My mother grew more grim.
My father grew smaller.

He was still a
ray of life

But now—
he was farther from the sun.

He wasn't so tall
in his wheelchair.

He smiled less—
I smiled less.

His silences
stretched longer

And the sun
got farther away

But he was still a redwood,
still strong.

And then—
The strength failed.

And there was
only silence.

Because no one could hear
the snow globe of my life

exploding around me— the
glass shards shattering

Into jagged pieces, the
happy scene inside— demolished.

Because— his death
was the death of my childhood.

My innocence,
My security,

My childish faith,
that everything would be okay

destroyed. And the redwood
was gone.

He towered over my childhood.
Taught me things

that only now
I am beginning to understand.

I died
when he died,

But I also lived—
I also learned.

We don't know how much
time we have.

I am a redwood.
and

I
am closer to the sun.