**A Father’s love**

**By Ruhani Chhabra**

a father’s love is subtle yet strong,

captured in the nighttime shadows

as he waits for his little girl to come home,

the kitchen clock ticking with the reminder time has passed

since those early days soaked with white sunlight,

when she’d giggle deliriously on his secure shoulders.

he’d take her to soccer practice and sleepovers,

attend recitals that he found less enjoyable than his wife did.

he wiped blood from her knee

when she first learned to ride a bike,

and the wound hurt him more than her.

he was greeted with gleeful cries with his presence,

in the evening when he came home exhausted

but he was never too tired to gather her in his arms.

she didn’t realize it then,

but he was never to remain so strong and unbeatable,

her father was really just a man,

a man in the nighttime shadows,

whose lower back ached from age

and eyes drooped from sleep he didn’t allow;

only the confirmation that his daughter

was safe could propel him into

a relaxed rest.

her father was only a man,

built from his childhood dreams

and shaped by how the world treated him

just like everyone else.

as one grows older, the realization

that their parents are people

hits them harder than it should;

flaws are unthinkable in everyone’s

first caretakers,

but embrace them.

often times those flaws

are amplified by their love.

for when she opens the front door,

she sees his slumbering muscles tight and frowning,

and in the morning perhaps his voice will rise,

demanding why she didn’t come home on time.

she can’t help but roll her eyes until she comes closer;

his love is clear

in the twitching muscle of his jaw,

his stressed pattern of snoring.

she squeezes his hand;

he doesn’t wake,

but his muscles instantly loosen,

a hint of a smile on his face.

and it all comes back to her —

the devoted man who coached her soccer practice

and sang silly songs so she wouldn’t cry

as he rubbed ointment on her knee,

and fell asleep at her dance recitals

but brought a bouquet of roses every time.

the sacrificial man who worked so tirelessly

yet clung to her every evening.

the older man now sitting in the nighttime shadows,

worrying that he’s no longer a central presence

in his daughter’s life.

but he always would be;

the alternative is unbearable.

she would just have to protect him

as he has protected her all these years,

even if he never admits it.

his little girl drapes a blanket over him

and kisses his forehead.

*BTSYA volunteer, Ruhani Chhabra is passionate about creative writing and has been exploring her craft since she was very young. At the age of ten, she published her first book, The Karris Family. Since then, she’s been nationally and globally recognized for her short stories, poems, personal essays, and dramatic scripts. Through being a reporter and host at Express Yourself! Teen Radio, she hopes to become more interactive with people. Her focus is on teen leadership and her segment is titled, Teenship. www.ExpressYourselfTeenRadio.com*