

"Walt Disney's head is in an icebox somewhere," Jake leans over in his seat and whispers to me somberly. His suit puffs out at his shoulders and the sleeves almost reach his fingertips. He looks like an undergrown linebacker. I glance over at his disheveled black hair and the tooth gap through which his ragged tsunami breath whistles. He takes this eye contact as an invitation to keep talking. "For when scientists can bring people back to life. That's what we should have done with Grandma. We had to rent this church, right? We could have bought a freezer for her head." I furrow my eyebrows at him and forcefully press my index finger against my mouth. He falls silent and my attention refocuses towards the waxy old preacher, who is calling out to God that He is now joined by a woman who has loved and feared Him her entire life. Jake's dad, my Uncle Steve, was Grandma Rita's youngest, so he was brought up closer to her heart and by extension the rosary resting next to it than my mother and her older sister, Susan, were, but my family still considers ourselves pretty Christian. This, though, is something new for me.

The priest closes his Bible with a soft dusty thump and turns the service over to the next track on a CD full of songs that Grandma Rita had loved, songs that had been playing in the background whenever we came over for Thanksgiving dinner. Chiming hymns and rich ballads like rolling hills in Ireland. Evidently, though, they haven't been exported onto the disc correctly; they skip and glitch and it sounds like some sort of morbid electronica. To hide my snickering, I drop my head down like I am in prayer and think about a cryogenically frozen Disney. I imagine him being revived after centuries of

technological advancement; I wonder how he'd readjust. I saw my grandmother in that casket, and let me tell you, there is for sure no eternal self in dead bodies. She was fragile and hollow, a cicada shell. So any sort of immortal personality must be floating around in infinity until Walt's heartbeat is warmed up into existence again.

What do years of dormancy do to a soul? I imagine him coming back with some ESP version of PTSD. Instead of hearing gunshots ricochet off his skull he'll hear silence heavier than artillery shells. The pastor picks up again, and finally, Jesus says something I like, that "in my Father's house there are many mansions." I picture God like a person, memories flashing behind windowpane eyelids, full of rooms with locked doors.. I wonder if He ever feels too small to contain them. Jake puts his feet up on the pew in front of us.

Afterwards, outside, Christine is hugging people goodbye, her face flushed pink and swollen plump. Glistening tear trails are stained into her cheeks. I've always had sort of a thing for her, a cousin crush, but I'm sure she sees me the way I see her little brother Jake. She's seven years older than me, and her family lives in Florida while mine lives on the east coast, so I only see her periodically. Her dad, my mother's younger brother, has brought Subway sandwiches because there's "no reason we should be hungry *and* miserable." I like my Uncle Steve. He calls me Ryan the Giant and tells me how much taller I've gotten every time he sees me. My mother's tired arm hangs around my neck as she and I walk over to join the rest of the family. I take a sandwich.

It's one of those bright watery winter days, the sky full of sun that somehow makes the air feel colder. Squinting against the wind, I walk across the sludge-ridden

parking lot over to Christine. She is shivering in her thin black dress, the tiny hairs on her arms standing at attention along her goosebumps. It looks like her skin is baring its teeth; when she gathers me into her arms, I half expect them to swallow me alive. "Oh, Ry," she exhales into my hair, "thank you for coming."

"Of course. She was my grandma too," I gulp.

"Want to ride in Aunt Susan and Uncle Hasim's car with me and Maureen and Jake?" she offers. My mouth full of Subway, I nod.

Our Aunt Susan doesn't have any kids and she's built on routine, so she's taking the loss harder than anyone. Her eyes are red, grief pulling down the bags under them, when we get into the backseat of the car. Hasim, used to tragedy, is a calmer spirit. He came here from Saudi Arabia in his twenties and has done very well for himself, but his parents are still there. "They live in an area with bombings, it is a lot of violence there," he explains as we drive to the cemetery for the burial, his large hands on the steering wheel, "and a week ago, they called me, they were robbed at knifepoint." Maureen's eyes open wide. "That's horrible! Why haven't they left yet?" she exclaims. Hasim tells us about a farm that his father owns and loves like another son. Hasim's parents live on it, in the town where they grew up. "I tell him, 'it is not safe there, you will die'," Hasim laughs, "and he replies always: 'Good, I will die with what I know! My wife, I will die with, and my property! I will die with my house!'" Maureen doesn't get it. I think to myself that Hasim's father's house contains many mansions. Susan's bony fingers close around her husband's hairy knuckles as she sighs, "We pray to God every day that they just come and stay with us." I think about the pastor's speech and I wonder who lives in

more fear, Hasim's parents or Susan. Jake leans in towards the space between Susan and Hasim.

"That's dumb," he concludes, "why don't they just leave?"

The back of the car is packed, these three siblings and I squeezed together, so Christine's thigh is pushed airtight against mine. I feel her move as she says to Jake, "Because they love their home more than they're scared." I look into the rearview mirror and get a glimpse of the soft shine in Uncle Hasim's eyes behind his glasses as he looks at Christine.

"Exactly, sweet girl," he nods, "it is their home."

The "sweet girl" comment causes not a pang of jealousy so much as a weighty envy in my gut. Christine is Hasim's favorite of Uncle Steve's children, while everyone else is infatuated with either Jake or Maureen, who is 24 with laugh lines and a bartender fiancée. Sometimes Hasim feels like competition, even though he is crazy about Susan and loves Christine like a child. Besides, she's my cousin and I am 14 and she is 21, so there is no goddamn competition in the first place. I tell myself this until we get out of the car and I have space to breathe again.

I help carry the coffin, so I guess I am considered a "man of the family." That's not saying much, though, because across from me, shouldering the other side of the casket is Jake, all of 9 years old. While marching towards the gravesite, I hear Christine murmur to Maureen, "It's sad that he has to do this. He's just a kid." I assume she is talking about Jake, but either way, I straighten my posture and harden my face like a Marine.

Our whole family has flown out for the funeral, and the kids spend the rest of the day lounging in our hotel rooms, eating big boxes of greasy pizza, and laughing, running back and forth between the pool and hot tub in the built-in natatorium. One by one, people retire to their rooms and by 10 P.M., only Christine and I are left.. One side of the wall is Plexiglass and I can see the inky sky outside, pressing in on our fluorescent paradise. She is right next to me in the bubbling hot tub, her eyelids drooping as the water pounds against her back. Her skin is not cold anymore, no longer looks like little sharp teeth. Instead, it looks sizzling to the touch, soft and inviting. She lolls her head over towards me, smiling with her red lips, and it would be so easy to reach out, to lean in, to...

But instead, I think of bombs blowing beloved floorboards to smithereens. I think of brilliant minds being recycled, suffering in coolers. I think of my grandmother's peaceful face in that casket, so light without any conflict inside. And I think that sometimes fear is the best way to love. Hot water dripping down my body, I rise from the hot tub and run full speed in the opposite direction, not stopping until my head is completely submerged in the icy water.