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Horizontal Accidents

People always look twice when you peel out in a hearse. Boeve tells me we are going to be late, and I straighten my tie the best I can for a clip-on. We put the windows down and turn the music up loud. We got a funeral in less than an hour and nobody has started setting up.

Boeve got me this job as a fill-in pallbearer for Adamac Funeral Home—the first to franchise funeral homes into more of a retail outlet for death. You can order a funeral as easy as an item on the Biggie Burger value menu. We can get them from the viewing and into the ground in less than fifty-five minutes. No one likes the sound of hearing that a funeral can take place in under an hour.

It is during this time that no one ever thinks they'll be robbed after they die. This combination of opportunity and tragedy is what pays the bills. Grave robbing is only half of what we do. You can pull up a U-Haul and load up a house and never hear as much as a whisper from the neighbors of the recently deceased. We use a hearse. The window of opportunity to rob someone after they die is very small. We have to get in before the family starts circling. We are all vultures. Some of us just get there sooner.

Neighbors rarely, if ever, know someone has died. This makes the robbery that much easier. The people we focus on were old and lonely. Widows work the best and we can gauge, by the number of attendees, how lonely they were. We don't have to worry about the neighbors because they don't take the time to know them, and other than their kids, occasional knockings to sell them magazine subscriptions or some bullshit that could win them a bike, they don't care either. Basically if no one knows them, then no one knows anything is missing. Other than the occasional knock, people do not notice them. People don't care and the Smiths don't mind anyway because they're dead.

It wasn't my idea to call them the Smiths. I would call them nothing, but what the hell would we refer to them as? Even dead people need names. Smith was the most generic we could come up with. We bury Smiths on the weekends and rob them during the week.

"It's not really a gimmick," Boeve says. I shake my head and he squeezes his fingers around the butt of his cigarette and drives the hearse. We begin debating the linguistics of robbing the dead. His nails are chewed up from lining caskets all day. The smoke clears and he goes over it again.

“It’s easy money.” He begins talking fast like he always does when he gets excited. “It’s not like we are robbing a bank or doing some scam.” I don’t know where I broke down or gave in. I can’t remember the first house we did or how much money we made. He finishes his smoke and shoves the hearse into park. We have been doing this ever since I moved in with him.

The fill-in pallbearer thing started when I needed a job, and then expanded into helping do everything else. Boeve had been working at the funeral home since he discovered that stability in the death market never wavers. People never apply for jobs at the funeral home; they just wind up there. The funeral hierarchy is a pretty simple system. They got us to do the legwork, a minister, to do the service, and the guys who dig the graves with the backhoe. The funeral home is the real thief. You wouldn’t catch a funeral home director with a hefty bag rummaging through your closet, but you could catch him selling you plots that overlook majestic valleys or caskets made from the finest oak. Both of these things you will never get, but you can’t say anything because you’re dead. There are two kinds of thieves, the one who steals when you are not looking and the other who does it to your face.

The manager grumbles something, and Johnson, the fake minister, gives us a smile. I know Johnson. He has *street* written all over him. You can see it in a man’s eyes when he has spent the night in a shelter or on the concrete. It never leaves them. We get right into setting up the chairs, and I make my way to the janitor’s closet for the plastic flowers. Boeve runs to the back room to go over the Smith one last time before we bring him out.

We have this pamphlet you can look through before you die to choose a floral tribute. Whatever you spend, you get the same thing. The flowers don’t even smell real anymore. They use to be laced with some fake smell, but now they just smell like the janitor’s closet: bleach. The carnations are beginning to fall apart and I think about telling Boeve this because it sort of concerns me that the fake flowers don’t even look fake anymore. He wouldn’t care. Boeve would only patronize me and act like he cared. There are few things that matter in the funeral home business, customer service being the least of them. I guess people are numb anyway when someone passes. They don’t care about the flowers or type of wood the casket is made of. Boeve yells for me, and I toss out the last flower arrangement.

“We got a problem,” he smirks as he rests his hands on the casket lid. The back room of the funeral parlor is cluttered with everything you would need to stage a play. “This one’s wearing his birthday suit.” I think back to Johnson’s smile and shake my head. I asked him where the clothes box went. He points to the back and begins padding himself down for a lighter. I begin digging through this old refrigerator box looking for something we can cover him with. “They must have forgotten this was an open casket,” Boeve laughs. All I can find is this old gray jacket, and he says it will have to do. I ask him what the hell he’s going to do about the other half.

“Grab a blanket or something.”

"You gotta lift him," I tell Boeve. "I don't like touching them, you know that." He grumbles something that ends in fuck. He eyes the Smith and it reminds me of the time I watched him work the embalming machine. It got backed up. The machine is like a pool pump. One cord goes into your jugular and removes the blood. This is while a second cord is run up into your chest pumping in this Pepto Bismol pink shit. When an embalming machine gets backed up you have to take your fingers and press down on the skin of the embalmer and run your fingers up and down the body like you are smoothing out sheets. This gets everything moving, and I watch Boeve attack this situation with the same emotion. He lifts the stiff corpse up and I try and get the jacket around the arms and over his chest. We wrestle the jacket onto the corpse. When it is all said and done, beads of sweat are running down our faces and the Smith looks like he just got tackled. His make-up is smeared and the jacket is crooked. Boeve snaps his fingers and points to my tie. After clipping it on, he does this last little tuck and straightens it. "That should make everything alright," I tell him as he pushes the Smith's hair back down.

"Get a blanket and I'll cover his other half," Boeve says.

We wheel the Smith out in the funeral home viewing area and wait till the half hour service slash viewing is over. Johnson comments that, "We did a good job tucking that fella in." I look at the Smith with my clip-on tie and a charcoal-gray jacket and just shake my head. We stand around as no one shows up. I always wonder where the families are. We get a lot of these types of funerals. No one comes, or if they do, they leave right after the service. These are the ones we rob. The ones who don't have anyone.

"Do you ever wonder who will show up at your funeral?" Boeve gives me a look and shakes his head. "I don't think I will be too concerned about that then," he answers and gestures to get the Smith.

An average casket and body weigh around three hundred pounds or so. The stretcher we use is like some kind of industrial one that can be used to haul around dead cows or something; I don't know, Boeve told me once. It takes two seconds to lift them and secure them in the hearse.

"Make it quick," the owner leans over to say as Boeve fastens the last strap down. "We aren't billing by the hour." It takes five minutes to drive to the cemetery.

We never talk about the Smiths. This makes things easier. They're all Smiths to us. You have to hate the people you steal from because the second you start to think about them is the second you lose your edge. Boeve says he has heard of this in other professions, like bull riding. You have to hate the bulls and the Smiths.

We pull into the cemetery and Boeve turns the music down. "Don't wanna wake the dead," he says. We stand around for a bit and wait to see if anyone turns out. No one does. Johnson, the fake minister, asks Boeve for a smoke. We stand around the plot and blow smoke into the air. I ask Johnson if that is a real Bible when I see his hand covering up what looks like the word "Webster." He laughs.

"No, it's an old dictionary." We all laugh and bitch about the funeral home.

"Cheap bastards," Boeve says. Johnson begins to laugh louder. "They gave me money to go buy a Bible," he explains. "I spent the money on hooch and got this old girl from the library." We all have a good laugh over this. Johnson laughs because he thinks he is clever, we laugh because he didn't steal a bible. Moments pass and Johnson turns his head to the six-foot-deep hole we are all standing around. "Someday boys, someday." We shake our heads and spend a moment lingering on that idea before Boeve claps his hands together and walks back to the car to get the Smith.

Johnson smiles and gives me a nod before he starts to walk back to his car. I ask him if maybe he should say something. He just laughs and swings his hand waist high. Boeve comes back pushing the Smith and asks me to help him lower it down. This is another part of my job. We lower the casket down with pulleys and rope. It is easier than you would think. There is no room for the casket to go anywhere but down. And yes, we have dropped caskets. It makes this sound like a bag of groceries full of wood and eggs falling.

When we finally lower the casket all the way, Boeve jumps down the hole. It takes a certain mental rigor to pry a casket lid off and rifle through someone's pockets and search for rings on fingers and necklaces. Boeve has that rigor. The cemetery provides the needed privacy for one to grave rob. It would seem easier to do this back at the funeral home or maybe just before the viewing. This is how people get caught. The reason we wait is no one else will ever see them again after we are done. We are the last ones to be with the Smiths. This is our window of opportunity.

It's odd looking down at Boeve, six feet below, straddling a Smith. This is an odd way to make money, but rings aren't cheap. "Get the saw," he says. I hate getting the saw. Boeve keeps this tiny little saw in his car. It's like a tree branch trimmer, only it folds up like a Swiss Army Knife. I walk to the car and think about driving away and leaving him in the hole. He could climb out, but it would take some effort. I toss down the saw and he goes to work on Smith's hand. When you die, your whole body will begin to swell. Your fingers will bulge to three times their size. We will all go through this or be smoked in an oven.

I think about how it looks, from a distance, as I help pull him out of the plot. Boeve says it is better if he does this in the ground than in the hearse. You can't tell anything has happened. The lid looks like it did five minutes ago before he sawed off the Smith's wedding band. The dirt looks like chocolate cake inside the hole, and in a little while they will come by and fill in the plot. Another Smith will be in the ground. I tell Boeve I am going to Biggie Burger and ask him if he wants anything. He says no before shutting the hearse doors and pocketing the ring.

There is not much you can say when you walk out of a restaurant and a man is face down, smashed into your roof of your car. The natural reaction is to look up to see where he came from and to see if more are coming. I stare up at the

parking structure that piggybacks up to the Biggie Burger. I do this like everyone else and stand there in amazement at the sight of this suicide.

A small crowd rushes out of the Biggie Burger and we stare at the car. The car emits steam or something. It looks like his soul rising up. Chunks of glass and plastic pieces that resemble nothing crunch under my feet as I approach the car. A chubby lady next to me squeezes out a word, "fuck," and takes a sip of her Biggie Drink. I shake my head and offer nothing to this situation. My car is fucked. I look down and see oil or blood, something, running out from the bottom and into the sewer grate. I step back, and in doing so, direct the chubby girl to do so. She steps in the blood on accident and it squishes between her toes that are lodged into a sandal. She screams like she is jumping from the top of the parking structure and drops her drink. It mixes into the oil and blood and becomes something entirely different.

Everyone acts stiff at the scene of the accident. No one rushes for help or offers to do anything for him. This makes sense, but doesn't. Everyone stands around the car like he might pop up with his mouth full of my dash and say something. He doesn't and we continue to stand there and watch him.

I take the long way around the puddle coming from the car and pop the trunk. Everyone shifts into grimace mode when I pop the trunk. He doesn't move. He is about six inches deep into my dashboard with his necktie wrapped around his neck. It moves like a flag in the wind as each car buzzes on by. I dig through the magazines and old mail. I push past the pop cans and the empty containers from Biggie Burger, searching for a blanket or towel or something. I find nothing and slam the trunk shut. He doesn't move. The metal outline his body has made almost looks cookie cutter-ish.

"Does anyone have any blankets or towels or anything?" I ask, hoping for some kind of response. The chubby girl is digging at her toes with a napkin. Rubbing away the soda, blood, and oil. No one responds. I go inside and grab three napkin dispensers and walk back out. I begin to cover him with Biggie napkins. One napkin at a time I begin to cover his body like snow. Some Asian guy walks up behind me with his shirt vacuum-tucked in over his small gut and opens his hands. I give him a bunch of napkins and we go about covering this man. It seems like the right thing to do.

The authorities come and I spend three hours signing paperwork and refilling my Biggie drink the manager gave me for free. He'd asked me if I would please not sue and handed me the drink. This peace offering went far to quench my thirst, but did nothing to fix my car. I told him we would talk later. The police give me a ride to Boeve's house. The day is fucked. I say this as the officer puts me in the backseat.

I find Boeve locked in the bathroom and it takes me twenty minutes to explain to him the cops aren't here for him.

"Are you sure?" he keeps asking this over and over again.

The lock makes a popping noise and he finally pokes his head out. "I knew

you wouldn't do something like that." He tells me a lot of things run through your head when a patrol car pulls up. "I was gone, man, like down the street gone." I tell him about the guy taking the plunge at the parking garage.

"That's fucked up," he says. "What are you going to do without a car?"

I told him I don't know. Insurance doesn't cover this sort of stuff, only horizontal accidents. They don't cover divers. They said I need to get in contact with the family and maybe I could sue them. I don't feel too much like calling some family that just lost a dad, brother, whatever he was before he jumped, and ask them about how they are going to pay for my car.

"Well, while you were off dealing with that, I scouted a Smith's home and it looks good from the road." Boeve does these things on his day off. In between his duties at the funeral home, Boeve dresses up and goes to the door of dead Smiths and acts like he is selling encyclopedias to make sure no one is living there still. If no one answers he makes a few circles around the house. If the neighbors ask, he tells them he is looking for family he thought might show up at the house. People are quick to back down if you say a family member has just passed away. It's like a shield or waving a gun in a bank—says it and you'll get a response. Boeve calls this "scouting." He cases the homes or apartments. He looks in the windows and he diagrams the whole robbery in his head.

"This time I checked for dogs," he says with confidence. It only takes one time being chased or barked at to make you think about checking every time. "I walked the backyard looking for shit." The last time he didn't, it took us ten minutes of wrestling to finally smother the dog. You would think two men could smother a dog, but dogs have teeth. This boosts my morale, and he asks me if I want something to drink as he walks into the kitchen. It was a black lab and it took everything we had to hold it down and smother it with a bag Boeve brought. We should carry knives or something, but then we become armed robbers. There is some kind of legal issue here Boeve was telling me about, but I forget what. I look at his desk and come across a postcard in a frame.

"That is just a little reminder, you know?" he walks back in and hands me a Mr. Pibb. I ask him what this is. "You've never had Mr. Pibb?" he scowls. "It is like the uneducated step-brother of Dr. Pepper."

I ask him where is Fiji. "I am not really sure, but it looks hella nice and it is far away." I am not sure if anyone really knows where Fiji is either. The name kind of sells itself as it rolls off your tongue. "You've got to give yourself a mental goal to focus on when you're sawing a wedding ring off the Smith's hand," he says and sips his Mr. Pibb. "I like to focus on palm trees and sand as I get down to business." I agree with him and we watch TV for the rest of the night. Before Boeve gets up to go to bed, I ask him if I could crash there tonight, just like I did last night and the last hundred or so before that. "You know it," he says before he turns out the light.

I wake up and Boeve is sitting in his recliner, not stolen from a Smith, watching

the "The Price is Right." "I love this goddamn show," he says in between yelling out prices. Boeve works when he wants to. "You can line caskets at 8:00 am and 8:00 pm." By the looks of things this morning, he hasn't been out scouting houses. He is just reclining back, sippin' on Mr. Pibb. "I would like to do the set up for Bob Barker's funeral," he says as I rub my eyes and swing my feet off the couch. "I would love it," he continues planning Barker's funeral. "Wouldn't it be great to do someone who is famous?" This is fucked up, but then again, so are a lot of the things we do.

We finally get out the door and go to Biggie Burger to order stuff off the Dollar Seventeen Menu, which is no longer a dollar seventeen due to the "swan dive" as Boeve calls it. I still have to split the cost with him because Biggie Burger will only give me free food, but not friends. It cost me 58 and half cents for each item Boeve gets. He calls the half-cent even since he drove.

"So what are you going to do about your car and stuff?" Boeve asks in between bites. I don't know and at this point I really don't care. I figure the less I have to worry about in life, the less that can go wrong. I don't let him know this because Boeve is a self-described optimist. Part of me wants to go to the funeral and I tell him this. "Why?" he says with his mouth full of burger.

"I don't know, I think I need closure or something."

"What you need to do is sue the motherfucker for landing on your car."

"Something tells me he doesn't care." We continue to chew. I think about the jumper's life and Boeve thinks about whatever people who rob the dead think about. It's not like we are that much different or I am any less guilty of the things he does. I am there with him, digging through drawers and picking through closets. Part of me likes what we do. Boeve told me once, "We are like Robin Hood." I can't make the connection. We steal from the dead and give to the lazy.

"I want you to rob me if I die." Boeve says this before wiping off the ketchup from his face. His request holds no weight until he at least wipes his face. "I want you to, really." I believe him and he continues on. "I don't even care if someone robs me when I am dead. What the fuck do I need anything for? You can rob me. I want you to rob me when I die."

He drops me off down the street from the funeral because he doesn't want any confusion about which hearse they are using. He repeats this one more time before I leave to go to the funeral. "You don't owe him anything."

"He owes you a new car," is the last thing I hear as the tires squeal and the back end kicks around, leaving a double black S in the pavement. I don't blame Boeve, and I think about this as I walk down the street to the Jumper's funeral. I don't even know him. All I know about him is that he jumped from a parking structure next door to a Biggie Burger and landed on my car. I think this could be a message from God or just a horrible coincidence, which are undecipherable from God and his acts.

I get to the funeral home late, however my stomach is packed full of greasy

goodness. I work at a funeral home, but everything is more surreal when you don't get paid for attending. I dodge the line of people greeting the family and move into a room packed with poster boards of this man's life. I walk through his life and I live it. I feel like I am there taking the pictures. Telling his family to smile, unwrapping the Christmas gifts, posing with Mickey Mouse. I am with them.

I see the timeline of her life, from barely crawling—to braces to posing on the front porch for high school dances. I watch her dad get older and her grow up. This man's life has been captured in 4x6 Kodak pictures. I am not sure if I should be happy or sad. I stare at this shot of them at a restaurant. They must be celebrating something. I pulled it off the poster board and put it in my pocket. I wonder why he jumped. What did he think about before he went through my windshield and into my dash?

"You must be John's son," the old lady says. I stand still like maybe the old lady is just calling out to someone like old people do to get attention. "You got his hair." I turn and say "Hello." She takes my hand into hers and slaps her other hand on the top of mine and squeezes. "It's good to see you." I don't know what to say. The old lady begins to pull me into the other room where everyone is gathering for the funeral service. My body begins to feel like an electrical storm is rolling over me. The currents I can feel coursing through my veins.

"Look everyone—John is here," she announces. A few people notice. The funeral parlor is quiet and dimly lit. I lean down to her to tell her I am not John. I am prepared to tell her anything to get her to let go of my fingers. I will tell her, if I have to, that I am the one who gets the saw that gnaws off old ladies' fingers like hers. I will do anything to stop the storm that was coming over me.

"Grandma, who is this?" I open my mouth to tell her but Grandma is decisively quick. "Paige, look it's John." Paige looks me over with those blue eyes bordered in red. "Grandma, John isn't here," she rubs her eyes. "John died years ago." She then turns to me and apologizes. I stop her and say I am sorry. "My grandmother is very old," Paige tells me. "Sometimes she gets confused." Paige turns and begins steering her grandmother down the aisle and into the pews. I find a spot in the middle-to-back because you never want to sit in the back row of a half full church during a funeral. It makes you look like you only half want to be there or you have some kind of beef with the dead, like maybe you want to sue him over landing on your car. I sit on the edge near the aisle in case I need to bail.

The service is tasteful. They have real flowers and a quality minister to oversee the service. Some guy the Jumper grew up with begins crying during his eulogy. It's always awkward when grown men cry. There is no consoling them. They are left to their own tears. I get out of there after that. I need the air and I don't feel very productive just sitting there. I light a smoke and sit on the front steps knowing in a few minutes the Crying Man and five other friends of the Jumper will load him into the hearse.

I sit there for a few moments before Paige walks out. I try to move but freeze. What am I going to say to her? Paige digs through her purse before asking me for a smoke. "You don't mind, do you?" I tell her no. We stand in our smoke like chimneys do.

"Nice service," I say. I don't know why I said that after I did. It just comes out. She shakes her head and agrees. "They do a nice job here," Paige adds. We could be talking about a restaurant or a dry cleaner, but we are talking about a service. It's awkward standing outside a church with a girl whose dad just died. I think she understands this too. I try not to look at her because I think I fear she will figure me out.

Beautiful women want to be looked at. I keep my eyes to the ground. The wind rustles the trees outside the church, and I think about the winter that is coming. It won't be long before we will be using the heat lamps to defrost the ground for burials. Paige has thin legs that disappear into her waist. She is too young for hips. Her eyes look up at the afternoon sky, and I can see the raw skin between her face and eyes. It is blistered red from crying. I want to touch it. I want to run my fingers along her eyelids. She pushes the cigarette between her lips and smoke tumbles out of her nose. "I want to be cremated," she says. "None of this fucking bullshit." She is mad now. This is all a part of the grieving process. "Do you know what I mean?" she asks. I do and the bell atop the church rings, signaling the funeral is over and they will be bringing the Jumper out. "Shit," she says as she puts out her cigarette and wipes her eyes. She is gone before I can tell her I am sorry about her dad. I walk back to Boeve's thinking about the things that make people jump off parking structures.

When I get home, he is waiting by the door. "Come on—let's get one in tonight." We don't do night jobs, but Boeve thinks this is just the thing I need to get over the Jumper. What I really need is tickets to Fiji. He hands me the bags and nods his head. "I am not up for this."

"Up for what?"

"Come on,"

"Come on, what?" he says with a hint of frustration. "This is what we do."

Boeve backs the hearse into the driveway and we sit there. The silence is unavoidable. Every move or twitch we make explodes in the car. Finally, Boeve undoes his seatbelt and reaches for the door. "You don't have to, if you don't want to." The illusion of choice is supposed to be his way of being nice. He knows and I know I am coming in. Boeve only said that to try and smooth things over. I let him walk around to the back gate and let himself in before I finally get out. I don't think there is any use in getting out right away.

The back door is unlocked, and a cloud of cigarette smoke circles before fading in front of Boeve's face. "After you," he says. We step into the kitchen to find it totally clean. We have walked into other houses where food or the trash had spoiled, and the smell almost made you turn back. This kitchen is neat.

"Must of cleaned before dying," Boeve announces and we walk quietly around the house. I never understand this. We never speak much in someone's house. We never talk, but look and pocket things. Boeve bypasses the living room. It's something we do because there is no money in electronics like TVs or anything. It's a huge hassle and not worth the effort, Boeve told me once. You can make just as much finding a jewelry box or something that looks old. We walk past the pictures that hang on the steps, and I look at each one as we stumble up the stairs. We get upstairs and I can feel it in me. That feeling you get when your spine begins to try and separate itself from your back.

The master bedroom is dark as we step in. The shades are drawn and we can only vaguely see around us. Darkness has this certain glow that outlines something and leaves other things shapeless. Boeve digs for a light and I run my hands over the wall like a rock climber searching for a niche. The light makes a snapping noise and I go blind for that half second before my eyes adjust.

We rummage the room. Baby Boomers keep everything of value under the bed. I don't know what they were thinking; it's not a vault. They must find comfort in sleeping on their treasures. Now Boeve finds that same pleasure in raiding it. I stand there and watch him holding the bags, thinking about Paige, her father, my dashboard. I no longer hate the bull or the Smiths for that matter. The bull is riding me now.

I would've robbed the Jumper if he came to our funeral home. This makes me tingle like rolling in pine needles. I would rob Paige if she came to our funeral home too. I would've got the saw and Boeve would've cut off her fingers to get at her rings and never noticed her eyes. I would've dragged bag after bag of stuff from her house without thinking twice. Then when we got home, I would've dumped each bag out like a kid with Halloween candy and sorted every last bit.

"You about done," I ask.

He looks up and shakes his head. "You gonna do anything while we are here?"

I walk out into the hall and back downstairs. I walk the living room and eye a clock shaped like a trout. I stuff it in the bag to make it look like I did something and walk out to the car. Boeve comes strolling out a few minutes later with a sandwich in his hands. He doesn't say anything to me the whole ride home.

I don't feel like sleeping on his couch tonight and I don't feel like walking to a shelter and I can't drive anywhere because my car is totaled. This is what the French call "fucked." He tells me he will see me in the morning, and I tell him goodnight.

I lie there on the couch and stare at the picture of the Jumper and Paige. I think about how if I was a different kind of guy I could track her down and maybe lie to her. I think about all the things I have missed out on and all the things I want. I think about the warmth of waking up next to her and seeing

her hair washed over her face and the way in which her eyes opening would be like the sun rising. I could tell her I knew her dad or we were buddies and he always talked about her. I could make her fall in love with me. We could run off. We could forget about all the pain we have here. I think about this as I fall asleep.

The manager tosses the shovels into the back of the hearse. "They called in sick." I am still tired from last night. Boeve squeals the tires of the hearse as we pull out of the funeral home and laughs as he takes a corner so fast that the Smith's casket shifts smack into the side of the hearse. We haven't spoke much since last night, but I can tell he wants to talk.

"What's going on?" Boeve breaks the silence. I don't say anything. "I am sorry about last night, ok?" I look at him and tell him it is ok. I lie. Nothing is right. He can see this and it makes him uneasy.

The cemetery is packed with people. We are burying some young girl. By the looks of the crowd, she was well liked. I don't read the board, so I know nothing about her. I just put out the flowers.

The sun dodges in between clouds at the graveyard, and after everyone leaves, we lower her into the hole like we always do. The dewy ground smells like rain, and worms sprout from the soil like *Night of the Living Dead*. I often wonder if any of these people wake up, if they would come looking for Boeve or me. I wonder if, in some far off place hundreds of Smiths plot their revenge with missing ring fingers to remind them of us. I suppose we will find out someday. Boeve jumps down into the hole and begins wrestling with the lid. I walk back to the car to get the shovels. I know he wants the saw. I know it will come to that. I can hear Boeve calling for it from the hole as I walk back.

"Why don't you do the string trick?" Boeve doesn't say anything. I pick his jacket up off the ground and hang it from one of the two shovels stuck in the ground. When we first started doing this, Boeve would keep a needle and string with him. You can get a ring off by threading the string around the ring then pulling the ring off. The saw is the evolution of grave robbing.

I have never heard him yell like that. He snaps, "Get the goddamn saw." He means it and I walk back to the hearse and dig under the seat in between cups and Biggie Burger containers till I find the saw. I just lean up against the car and think about everything. I think about Paige and the Jumper. I think about myself. I think about the breeze of napkins that twisted in the wind before the police arrived.

I hear him yell, but not in a mean tone, but in the kind of tone that you would use to get someone's attention. I walk back and look down on him. He looks at me and then looks away. I can tell he is sorry for yelling at me, but not sorry enough to not cut that ring off that girl's hand. He straddles the lid and then hovers over her like he is going to kiss her. Boeve's hand searches for hers, and when he finds it, he pulls up on it hard because, "Rigor mortis is a bitch,"

Boeve says.

I think about that ring as Boeve angles the saw. I am sure her mother gave it to her as a gift for her sweet sixteen or maybe some guy. Maybe he promised to marry her. She wasn't that old. That ring was a promise. I watch him push the jagged teeth into her skin. It makes a crackling noise when he hits bone. I listen and hear it snap. "Do you even check to see if you can wiggle it off?"

"The saw works fine, anyway it is too hard to wrestle around with them down here," Boeve yells up. He finishes up while I smoke the last of his cigarettes. A small mound of butts sit in front of me. Some I barely started, others I didn't. They are all gone when I hear him ask for a hand.

"You up there?"

I freeze and listen.

"Goddamn it, you know how I hate climbing out of here," he says as he begins to pull himself out against the dark black soil that smears against his white shirt. Boeve's head peeks up, and he sees his reflection in the silver mirror of the shovel. His eyes look up at me and I can't even see him anymore. The pink embalming fluid runs down his hand that sits on the grass with the ring. I look at him and see everything that is wrong with my life. I take the shovel like a golf club and line his head up like a small white golf ball sitting on a tee.

It makes an awful sound as his bottom jaw becomes embedded in the roof of his mouth. The shovel lifts him up just a bit before he falls backwards into the plot, crashing down on top of the casket. Blood runs out of his mouth and on to the cherry oak finish of the casket. I look at the bent shovel and toss it in with him. I sit down on the small mound of dirt that I will use to fill in the grave and pick through the rubble of butts till I find one that is half finished, and I straighten it with my fingers like I am correcting a crease in my pants. I begin to fill the dirt in around him with the other shovel.

My shirt hangs off me dripping with sweat and covered with dirt. My once white shirt is now zebra patched. I see the ring still sitting at the edge of the plot where the grass is a thick green and the hole is dark and deep. I grab the ring and wipe it clean with my shirt. It shimmers and I slide it on and off my pinky. I think about what Paige will say when I show her the ring and tell her what happened. "You saved that girl." I can hear her now. Shovelful by shovelful, I finish burying him until I can no longer see him and the dirt spills over the top of the hole. He never makes a sound.