

*The Storms of Outside Do Come Within*

As the funeral director made the final arrangements with the flowers, people trickled into the church, and found places on the pews. The service wasn't for another half hour, but many had already come, and many of the pews were already filled. Until the music began, a forced silence filled the sanctuary, and only hushed voices could be heard over the quiet. When the music did begin, many of those hushed voices relaxed, but strengthened in volume, as if they thought the soft, hollow notes of the pipe organ would conceal their voices or muffle them.

Jesse sat there in the very first pew, the one reserved for family. She was by herself on the long wooden bench, and she sat in the light from the window that streaked through Virgin Mary. The music from above filled her ears, but she could barely hear the notes over the thoughts that ran through her mind. The fight which broke out last summer between her dad and her grandfather filtered through her hazy thoughts.

Grandpa Emerson had invited Jesse and her father up for a week, and they weren't there even a day, when the two were at each other once again. Jesse searched for the reason of the argument as she sat on that gym-bleacher-hard pew, but she couldn't find it anywhere. Like the other fights, it was probably over a minor thing, and even the fights probably couldn't have recalled it. She only could remember that the fight entered yet another hibernation period when her grandfather had a horrible guttural coughing fit, which he got from too much smoking. Jesse was the only one of the two to stay the whole week; her dad lasted the afternoon.

Except when she occasionally, cautiously, looked back toward the entry way to watch for him, she sat quite still. She knew the chances were slim, but she was hoping he would at least come to the funeral. Jesse had called him last night at his new apartment once the arrangements had been finalized, and she nearly begged him to come. He had agree to be there, but now she was thinking that those were just words without any meaning.

Finally, Jesse caught sight of her Dad in the lobby that sits just outside the main church. He seemed uncomfortable, and

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was anxiously searching the rows of benches for her when a man touched him on the elbow, whispered in his ear, and pointed at Jesse. Her father came forward in a rapid walk, and as he walked his shoulders hunched forward, forming a cave, protecting him from the sharp glares of the people in the pews.

There were no secrets in a town that size, and everyone was well aware of the tension between those two men. They had seen it all, heard it all, in the drugstore and in the bank. Everyone her grandfather's age believed that they knew where the problem lay, and they were certain it was Jason, Jesse's father. They could not be convinced otherwise. They sided with her grandfather.

When he had reached the front and he sat down quickly, hardly acknowledging Jesse. In his profile, Jesse could see the beads of nervous sweat on his receded forehead, and his eyes looked angry, not sympathetic or sad. Jesse knew that he had probably only come because of her.

During the funeral, Jesse heard the minister speaking, but after the first of many prayers, and psalms, and other such rituals she forgot about the service, about her grandfather, and about her father, too. She noticed the carvings of fruit and angels on the wood of the lectern and the pulpit, and she noticed how the shapes continued up to the ceiling, constantly intertwining, to the border that went all around the room. Each shape was different, and she noticed in places the border carvings showed Bible stories. There was one of the Last Supper, and another of Moses and the Red Sea, and above the lectern Christ was carved on the crucifix. The wood border seemed to bind the walls together, supporting them, making them strong.

When the choir began to sing, Jesse came back to the funeral, and she looked at her grandfather lying in the bronze casket, with the peach velvet upholstery, his gray head resting on a plump matching pillow. Because her father said he was too busy, Jesse had made arrangements with the funeral director, and she had picked that casket because its golden hue resembled the sunsets that her grandfather had loved.

She remembered that as a little girl she would look through his photo albums, and they would be filled with hundreds of sunset pictures, all taken from the same picture window of his house. Her grandfather never talked about them, but when her

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grandmother was alive, she had told Jesse that her grandfather had always felt there was something special about a sunset, and as soon as he got a camera, he began taking pictures of them on days when something great happened. There was the sunset of the day her parents had married, of the day she was born, and, fitting Grandpa's sense of humor, even one of the day Nixon Resigned.

When the funeral was over, the funeral director came over to Jesse and her father, and ushered them out. When Jesse wheeled around out of the pew, she saw just how crowded the church was. Jason may not have liked his own father, but it was clear he was loved by others. There were many with red-stained cheeks, and a few women with velvet cloche hats crying to their embroidered handkerchiefs. Through their minds as they saw Jason walk down the aisle, went the episodes of argument that were so well known.

On the way to the graveyard, Jesse sat silently in the car with her dad. They had moved out of the parking lot and onto the road, and they were well through town before anyone spoke.

"Nice service, huh, Dad," said Jesse, watching his face to see how he would answer. A voice was not enough, when it came to her father, because, even though he could disguise his voice, his face revealed too much.

His answer, "Yeah...fine" came out uncaring, but the fluttering of his eyelids, and the bitten bottom lip, told something else. Jesse believed her father loved Grandpa Emerson in some way, but she couldn't understand why he refused to show it. He seemed to hold everything back like he was afraid that if the words or the emotions were allowed to begin spilling out he wouldn't be able to shove them back in fast enough, and they would all be out, for everyone to see. Grandpa Emerson was that way, too, like with the sunsets. He would let people see them, but he would never talk about them, never let anyone really understand them, or him. Jesse thought that was why they fought so much, because neither one ever understood the other.

A little while later, when they had reached the cemetery, Jesse stood by her father at the gravesite. It was bleak outside, as is customary for March, and even though it was late after-

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noon, the sun was nowhere. The wind repeatedly whipped a strand of Jesse's hair into her face, and it blew on the poor flower arrangements of pink and green until they tipped over. The minister tried to speak many more kind words, but the wind carried them away, and they were lost. It didn't matter to Jesse; she was cold, and wanted to go, and the words were the same spoken at the church, only different in a way.

When the entire service was finally over, several members of the town came to give their condolences, saying what a fine man Reynold had been, and how he had been such an asset to the town, and so on, but to Jesse the words seemed pointless, seemed to have no meaning. They sounded cliché, and the more she heard, the more she wanted to go. The crowds would slip past her father with a condolence of pursed lips, and move right to Jesse, spilling themselves to her alone. She felt overwhelmed, and finally, able to escape the swarms, Jesse and her father drove back to the church in silence.

She picked up her car at the parking lot, and she decided to meet her father at Grandpa Emerson's house. As he drove away, she went into the church to pick up some of the flowers. There were many beautiful ones arranged with carnations, and roses, but to Jesse it seemed odd to have such life at something so full of death. Without the casket they seemed out of place positioned on the floor, framing an empty space, so, without really thinking, she arranged the ones she wasn't going to take farther about the large room. When her work was complete the room seemed transformed, it was more beautiful now, more pleasing to her; now that death had gone.

When Jesse got back to the house, she could smell the food her father was cooking in the kitchen. She went to the doorway, and leaned against the dark wood door frame, watching him. He stood by the stove, bent over, elbow on the counter-top, hip against the cabinets, spatula ready and waiting. His face was to the wall, hid from Jesse, but standing that way he looked worn out. She thought that maybe finally he was hurting, that he was upset, and she felt the need to go to him. But at her first, emotion-filled step, though, the green, cracked linoleum squeaked, and her father bolted upright, and attended the hamburgers frying in the pan.

"Oh good, you're finally home," spoke her father light-

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heartedly. "I hope you're hungry, cause your grandpa's got about fifty pounds of frozen meat down in that freeze we're going to have to do something with."

Jesse, embarrassed and disappointed at the same time, sank into one of the old wobbly kitchen chairs, and softly replied to her father that she wasn't hungry. She was embarrassed because she had foolishly pretended that there was something, some expression, in her father; disappointed because there wasn't.

"Do you want any cheese on your burger?" questioned Jason, but not hearing a reply, he turned to her, and saw his daughter with her forehead resting against her propped-up fists, her eyes closed. He went to her and rubbed the middle of her back. After a few moments, he said to her, "Honey, I know you loved Grandpa, but everyone, well, everyone dies. You...you have to let him go."

"Grandpa?" Jesse said, confused, "You think this is about Grandpa?" Looking at him, she shook away from his touch and stood up. "This is about you, Dad! I'm upset at you! I don't see how you can be this way about your own father's death."

Her father looked away from her stare and escaped into the dining room, yelling, or rather emphatically stating over his shoulder, "He's my father, and I can be anyway I would like! Don't lecture me, Jessica, on my father, you have no idea how different we are."

"You're not different from him!" Jesse yelled, following him into the other room. "You're exactly the same! Neither of you would give in! Can't you for once let your guard down! Then you'd be different!"

The room became silent, and she saw her father standing at her grandfather's picture window, standing with his hands against the cold glass, and staring out into the evening western sky.

It was only for a moment, but Jesse thought that she saw the glint of a tear on her father's cheekbone, but when he turned away from the light it was gone again. He walked into the kitchen, brushing past her, his face down, and in clearing his throat, he quietly asked, "So..do you want cheese?"

Jesse walked over to the window. This is the one out of which her grandfather had picked so many sunsets. So many

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great, important days. The sun hadn't been out from the clouds all day, today. Fitting, Jesse thought.

The outside seemed so still, but one glance at the darkening, swiftly-moving clouds, showed that it was cold, and a storm might be coming. They were safe, though, here in the space of Grandpa's sturdy walls, and they were protected by the storms outside. What supports were there for the storms inside, thought Jesse.