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The Funeral

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Cover Page Footnote

This piece was brought into workshop in progress. Because we operate under a workshop model, we see value in an unfinished piece.

The Funeral

"The old coot had to go and die in the middle of summer, didn't he?" Chris languished, pulling at the edge of his collar. "You know that's really just like him" he grumbled through another bite of cheeseburger. "Probably wanted to watch us roast ourselves to death."

I rolled my eyes and hit the left blinker. "Oh yeah, I'm sure he wanted to give us all heat stroke." I had to agree, the funeral was miserable.

If you've never spent a summer in the South, I don't blame you. Let me tell you now, it's a unique hell sitting in the shade, content with the world and yourself, only to be dripping with sweat within the hour. I had yet to find anything in my life like the boiling haze of a Southern sun and the thick soup that is Georgian humidity.

He nodded wisely, ignoring my sarcasm. "Mmm... yes, take a few of us with him." More chewing. "Must've been the deal he made, devil gets his soul but only if he gets to watch us sweat like pigs in the sun."

"For god's sakes, Chris! You can't talk about the -"

"Oh, c'mon! Look, I'm not damning the guy to hell." I shook my head, Chris never liked to back track, this was about as close as he'd ever get to apologizing. "You Baptists really are not fun."

"You know, you're supposed to be Baptist too."

He sighed. "Look, I'm just *saying* none of us liked him anyway, and now we're sweating out vital minerals, for what? Mr. Lawrence Jackson who hollered at anyone just for looking at him." He paused. "And, he never gave us our football back."

"He gave us our football back."

"Oh, I am sorry. I may be mistaken, but are you, John Michael, talking about that punctured, grotesque, deflated piece of leather that was shoved in your mailbox? Let me tell you, no bush could've done that. That mean, spiteful, old man murdered our football."

"We were eight."

"Yes, we were eight. And..." the sentence stopped abruptly for another bite of cheeseburger which he now brandished for emphasis. "9 years ago that spiteful old man crushed my dreams, of being the football star Bryce McKinnon wished he were," he finished, his serious tone barely masking a grin.

Chris wasn't the athlete, I was. I could always out run him. Even during my college baseball years I was hardly ever gotten out when running to the next base. But Chris would catch me when we were younger by knowing exactly where to cut me off. And once he got me, it was over. I'd be left running after him as he led us to wherever he wanted to go next.

Sometimes he'd take us to the grocer down the block or sometimes back to his house a few neighborhoods back. But one time he went to widow Pilcher's abandoned house; a place I refused to go near, after hearing that the old lady's ghost attacked the teenagers who went there late at night. The incident caused a town ruckus as all of the backs on the football team high-tailed it back to their parents' house like bats out of hell. But, there we were, two scrawny eight year olds, staring down the peeling blue paint and chipped windows, a monstrous face whose mouth gaped open at the sight of us.

I'd refused to go in, staying in the weeds in front of the dilapidated porch, yelling warnings as Chris teetered on the steps. The place just never sat right with me, even before it gave the older kids a scare. I pulled Chris back when his fingers got near the door-knob, and booked it back to my house. Sometimes when coming back we'd cut through Mr. Jackson's yard, jumping the fence

and crouching in the bushes. It was always a gamble, going through Mr. Jackson's yard. If he saw us, he'd run out, brandishing his cane, which, by his speed, we guessed he kept around just to hit the passerby with. He'd grip our shoulders' and march us to my front door to berate my mother for our trespassing. The day would end up with Chris being sent home early and me going to bed right after dinner.

I thought of this as we turned onto Robinson's street, chuckling. "We sure gave him hell though."

He threw his head back and laughed. "Yeah, we sure did."

The lines of parked cars leading up to the house had started feet from the corner, so we decided to park the car in my garage and walk over, our blazers now formerly abandoned in the backseat. The good thing about Southern wakes is the food. It's all the comfort food that you'd imagine us to make, but everyone swears we don't eat all the time. What's bad about this food isn't the fat, but it's that we leave it out all day. I'm sure Mr. Jackson's sisters had set everything up before the wake, leaving out dishes neighbors had brought over before the service so that the first guests didn't have to wait to make a plate. And it's not like these things shouldn't be refrigerated. For all intents and purposes, they should. There's deli meat in sandwiches and mayonnaise in the potato salad. But we leave it out for hours anyways.