

Duane

Danika Ogawa

I remember grabbing his hand after it was over. I remember making myself grab his hand. I remember being disgusted with myself for thinking his dead hand was disgusting. I remember expecting it to be cold already, just seconds without blood flow. It was warm. I knew it wouldn't last.

"You're just a body now," I whispered at the lifeless frame. I almost believed it. Maybe saying it aloud would make me believe it more. I ran my thumb along the protruding veins atop his hand, like I had seen my mom do when comforting someone. It's such a shame. His skin was always pink, warm, and plump. Now it's empty, thin, and cold.

"My grandpa is in heaven, not here." I made myself say it. Maybe saying it aloud would stuff the idea in my brain. Maybe I thought it would make me understand. It didn't.

I knew what was happening. I understood that he was in a car crash. It would be odd if a head-on collision going 75 miles per hour *didn't* put you in the hospital. It was the speed of the situation that perplexed me. Not five days ago he was simply driving home from a quick weekend trip. (A funeral, ironically.)

I had never truly dealt with grief. At fifteen, my chief concerns were wishing I had a thigh gap, and One Direction's new single. Grief was the thing in the movies that happened right before the climax, the good part. Always clad with the dramatic montage of crying, wearing sweats to school, and sitting alone at lunch. The reality of it is much more private. There is no climax.

"Come on Dani, let's go." My mom had beckoned me out the door. It baffled me that we were expected to leave him there, alone.

There was no mortician to pull a sheet over his head. Like a movie, the hallways were dark, no doctors or nurses anywhere. Only him. A body.

My grandpa was so likable. He was quiet and loved routine. He never had kids and married my grandma after my mom and her siblings had already graduated high school. His grandkids were his kids. He was homecoming king in 1959, with my grandma as queen. Duane and Mary Ann. They were your typical high school sweethearts. He wasn't Catholic, so my grandma's parents encouraged her to marry someone else. She did and had my mom and her siblings. The marriage didn't last, and she ended up finding her way back to him, thirty years later.

He was always there, quietly. He frequently made Bloody Mary's at night and black coffee in the mornings. A thin bald man with red-toned skin, his eyes were a pale gray, almost blue. Looking back, I was most happy and at peace when I was at the lake with him. He did anything for my cousins and me. Every big event, there he was, the 94 camcorder in his hand.

The summer I was ten, almost eleven, I had a keen interest in American Girl dolls. My friends had large doll houses that they would play with, straight from AmericanGirl.com, and I had mentioned I wanted one. When I went to the lake to visit later that summer, he told me we were going to build one together. In stereotypical suburban America, fathers are the ones who throw the ball in the yard, build the doll houses, and fix the squeaky door. My dad was a little unconventional, so that stereotypical "father" was Grandpa Duane. We had spent the next few days buying pieces of wood, measuring, and cutting in the back of the garage. The doll house was half my height by the time we were done. He put it on wheels, so it would be easy to transport. He made it two levels, with four bedrooms. I wish I had played with it more.

I used to love listening to him hum while he made his peanut butter toast each morning, charcoal gray slippers covering his feet. He would make me my "coffee" in the morning so we could drink it together. This "coffee" was milk, coffee creamer, and chocolate syrup. Though, I remember feeling so important, so cool, to be drinking coffee

like a big girl with him.

I would sit in his lap sometimes, before I grew too old. He would let me hold his electric razor and pretend to shave his face (he left the cover on, thank God), and I would sit and shave his face. My mouth would make the razor sounds, tongue sticking out of my mouth in concentration. The skin on his neck hung down slightly, and when I was young, I would squeeze and pull it. It turns out the “droopy skin” was some sort of disease I can’t remember. It’s a rare disease that causes the underlayers of your skin to age like Jell-O, holding no form. It had caused the five-inch incision in his stomach to reopen, and reopen, and reopen. The cut from the seatbelt that sliced him open in the crash, shoulder to abdomen.

I had always imagined how I would act in a situation of trauma or stress, when the time came. I realize now what a privilege it was to think such a thing. Like my favorite book characters and movie stars, I imagined myself being tough and strong. Or what I believed tough and strong to be. Then, that meant holding in the tears and trying to make everything you do meaningful. Thoughtful. It was the first death that I felt. The first death that I noticed a change when I thought of him. My mother’s brother committed suicide at nineteen, which gutted her and my grandma. They had felt death before. They understood what it meant to lose someone unexpectedly. I didn’t.

I remember when they took him out of the ICU, when they knew he was going to die. They brought him to a room five or so levels up, in a part of the hospital that hadn’t been touched since the ‘90s. It was almost empty. The occasional nurse or patient would walk by, but otherwise it was like an abandoned backroom. There was an unspoken disappointment in the situation.

“Is he going to die here?” I whispered to my mom.

“Yes.”

We exited the elevator without a word thereafter.

Danika Ogawa is currently a junior at UND. She is majoring in English while working towards a certificate in creative writing. When she is not writing, you can find her reading, or teaching dance at a studio in town. Danika is from Grand Forks, ND.