

What I Remember

by Chelsea Wood

The day I found out that my brother was dead I got dismissed early from computer class. I remember rectangles of light cast upon the red tiled floor of the school lobby. My mother stood in front of the main office wearing sunglasses. We met without words and left the building. When we were halfway to the parking lot she just said, "We lost T."

Then she started crying and I was not speaking. I squinted my eyes in the sunlight and felt like waiting until we got into the car to say anything. I imagine that I must have asked something like "How?" or "What happened?" But I don't remember. I remember driving to my younger sister's elementary school and waiting in the car while my mom dismissed her as well. This time she waited until they were back inside the car before explaining it to her. Jill cried. I was just sitting there.

"She's in shock," I heard my mom say, so I assume Jill must have asked how I was or why I wasn't crying. I did not want to talk to anyone or have anyone talk about me, so I just watched the trees go by as we drove back home.

After finding out the news the next thing I remember is my mom's ex-husband being in our house. He was T's father. Jillian and I were in the living room watching a music awards show. The lights were out so the room was illuminated in the depressing blue wash of the television. It was too loud. I felt ashamed. I should be wearing black and sitting quietly sobbing in a corner somewhere. At least Jill had cried when she found out. There was something wrong with me.

I didn't go to school for a while, maybe a week. The next thing I remember is the wake. On the day of the wake my sister and I stayed with my dad at his apartment. I guess it made the preparations easier. I remember driving to the wake with my dad and his girlfriend. I remember my dad making a joke and everyone laughing.

At the wake they put the kids in the smoking room. I don't know why. It seems like the very worst place to put kids. So my sister and I sat among our group of cousins listening to their awed exclamations about the death. I felt like telling them all to shut up. But I didn't.

Instead I waited to be rescued. I'm not sure who did the rescuing. I just know that eventually I left that room with its depressing white walls and moved into a darker, more ornate room. This room had a row of chairs against one wall. I sat next to my step father and stared through the doorway across from us. From my seat I could see the casket in the next room. I remember the side of his face being visible over the rim. He looked pale and inanimate, not like he was sleeping, but like he was gone away someplace else. I stared for a long time because I didn't know what else to do.

“Do you want me to go with you?”

“No, thanks.”

The next thing was the funeral. I cried at the funeral. I listened to my older cousin read a letter that my mother wrote to T. I listened to some more talking. Then people went up to take communion and me and my sister stayed sitting. I was resentful to be placed in this unfamiliar setting for such a vulnerable and public experience. We never went to church. At the end they carried out the casket and my sister and I walked down the aisle together. I looked at people's faces. I saw my older sister's ex-boyfriend, the one that Jill and I both loved. There were hundreds of people in the church, you should know. T was important. But I felt like I was on display.

We drove to the cemetery in a black limo. It wasn't raining outside, or even overcast. My mom chose to play “Free Bird” on a stereo that we brought from home. Once a couple years later I almost cried in art class when it came on the radio. There was a large display of flowers and people were taking some for souvenirs or remembrances or something. My mom asked if I wanted one. I said no. She asked if I was sure. I said yes.

I don't remember what happened after the funeral.

Some days later, on September 11th, the World Trade Center towers were attacked. I was in Spanish class.

