X Marks the Spot

by Dianne McKnight-Warren

I was an only child, a son born late to a lonely, middle-aged couple who had long given up having children. To my devout mother I was living proof of a powerful, benevolent God who mercifully answered all prayers. But my father, a non-believer and suspicious of fortune too good to be true, bought a burial plot for me in a graveyard close to our house so my mother who never learned to drive could walk to it.

I went to that graveyard exactly twice. Once in 1967 when I was seventeen, I stood there looking down at the square of dry dirt and thinly sown grass trying to comprehend my ownership. Unlike my father I felt no intuitive connection, but if I'd had a crystal ball I'd have gone straight to the grocery store and quit my weekend job. I'd have spent Friday and Saturday nights at the drive-in having sex with my girlfriend in the back seat of my car.

I went from loading groceries into family station wagons to loading Skyhawks with canisters of napalm, the bombs that exploded into sticky fire. I remember how the pilots came back to base stoked, gods to themselves, gods to us.

According to an archived death record I died “around” 1969, but July 14 is the date seared on my mother's heart. My father remarried and went to his grave in another place but my mother lies next to me like a bride.

Our infant God yawns, chews his own toes, rattles the earth beneath from on high.

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