

Here, You Cry

by W. Scott Bowlin

You see your father for the first time in ten years. He stands on the other side of an open grave where, sooner than should have been, Uncle Nathan will be lowered into. You would think it ironic to see the living person you feel nothing but detachment for standing next to the no longer living person who, at one time, was the most important human being on the planet to you- if you were the sort of person who found things ironic. Irony is an unexpected twist, and none of this is unexpected. Nor is it a twist of any kind, they were brothers. One lived, one died.

A mist somewhere between rain and snow begins to fall, covering everything with a shiny, milky glaze. Aunt Lottie lays her cheek on the casket and rubs her hand across its top. She is far gone into grief. She no longer sees the crowd of mourners, the open hole, the back-hoe parked discreetly behind some trees . She only sees how shiny the coffin lid is when she rubs it.

The preacher says that Nathan made a commitment to Lottie, *till death do us part*, and today he honors that commitment. You think maybe there is no honor in dying and leaving behind a mindless grief stricken woman, and that the honorable thing would be to keep on living and spare her all this.

With that thought you turn away from the funeral scene, finding no grief yourself, only numbness. You are not sad because Nathan is dead. You are indifferent to your father's swollen eyes and Lottie's child-like fascination with the coffin lid. You think the preacher somewhat melodramatic. You think the crying people standing huddled in the rain took time to come to this funeral, but some hadn't seen him in years, and wonder what he meant to them.

You shoulder your way through the crowd, around headstones and plastic flower wreaths that litter the cemetery. You make it to the fence and through the breezeway into the courtyard in front of the

church where you see Miss Hadley. That's how you know her; when you were too small to touch the doorframe in the house you grew up in, you were sent off to school where you and your sister played together on the playground because there was no one else to play with. This is how it is when you live sheltered away from other people. You simply don't know how to interact socially, and so turn to family.

Once a week the kids at school got ice cream and popsicles. You didn't, you never had ice cream money. But you discovered whole, uneaten popsicles dropped on the basketball court and you picked them up and shared them with your sister and it made you feel good inside.

Miss Hadley one day took you and your sister to the ice cream room and told you to pick out anything you wanted. You each got a whole, unbroken, still-in-the-wrapper Popsicle- you remember this with clarity- the marbled white tile on the floor, the painted block walls, the sound the freezer lid made when she opened it. You picked your favorite color red and your sister picked grape.

Your sister's eyes shined and you grinned at one another and then Miss Angel bent down in front of you and said "we don't pick ice cream up off the ground" and you grew up a little for the first time, because you understood, even then, that Miss Hadley had simultaneously given you something and taken something away. You ate the popsicle, but it was your last, because you were never invited to the ice cream room again and you now knew the shame of eating off the ground.

You loved Miss Hadley deeply for this. Now, after surviving the entire funeral numbly and dancing unscathed through this field of grief you stare into the eyes of another person you haven't seen in twenty years. It is here, in the memory of popsicles, that you break down and cry.

