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St. Alphonsus

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The Burial of Daniel Nachtman

Darcy Joyner

Everything was carefully planned by Mr. and Mrs. Nachtman.

A short ceremony. A closed casket.

Mr. Nachtman wrote a short speech on behalf of the family. Steadfast as always, he did not shed a tear.

Mrs. Nachtman sat completely still next to her children, now missing another.

The three children watched silently as people began to filter in. Some came up to the family with looks of pity, offering condolences to Mr. and Mrs. Nachtman. Their eyes never stopped on the children.

Helena, the youngest, sat with her hand firmly in her older brother's. Her feet hung off the edge of the pew. She stared around the cathedral, watched the lights shine into her eyes and followed the walls up to where they bent and connected at the ceiling. Everyone around her was sad. It was because her big brother died and was laying in that coffin. She was trying to be sad, too. She tried to cry like all the others, but she wasn't sad. Daniel didn't feel dead in the same way her grandfather was dead. Grandpa got old and see-through, with purple veins that laid under his skin, and he stopped getting out of bed. Then they all gathered around his pale body and wide open mouth, and Mom made Helena kiss him on the forehead to say goodbye.

But Daniel just went away, and he never came back. So he didn't really feel dead.

From the corner of her eye she saw her mother's shoulders shaking through her breath and Jacob sitting to her right, his jaw clenched and his eyes far away. She always thought that Jacob was identical to Daniel, but looking at him now she didn't see Daniel's face anywhere in him. Her brother Samson had been clutching her hand for so long that the clammy sweat had grown comfortable. She saw the quiet stream of tears that ran down his cheeks as he stared ahead.

Samson didn't want to cry. He tried to control his breathing to hold down his sobs. He tried spacing out to numb his tears.

Why is this happening? he asked himself. *How could God possibly be so cruel?*

Beneath the lid of that coffin was his brother, sealed away and gone.

Was Daniel's body going to rot away in the ground? Would they throw away his bed and all of his things, or shut them away in a box somewhere? What if Helena died next?

What if he did?

Jim Waters — Photograph

St. Alphonsus

Tears burned their way down his face. He couldn't hold it in and breathed out a sob. Helena squeezed his hand, which turned his stream of tears into a relentless flood.

One day, he might go to Helena's funeral, or maybe she would go to his. Maybe he would get sick and die before everyone else like Daniel, and, like Daniel, he would have no choice but to let it happen. If he didn't, then he would have to watch his mother die and his father die, and he would be able to do nothing but say goodbye to them. Samson wasn't sure which one was worse. Maybe the worst part was that he couldn't choose. He prayed for there