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Zofia Oles — Photograph

Amsterdam

to be a heaven so that he didn't have to really die—and so he could see Daniel one more time.

Samson's stomach twisted into itself as he saw Mr. Gregory, the funeral director, make his way onto the modest stage at the front of the room. The coffin loomed behind him as he shuffled his papers and began.

"It is this morning we gather with heavy hearts. Today, we mourn the loss of Daniel Nachtman. Beloved son, brother, and classmate, devoted member of the church. For the last fourteen years, I, along with everyone here, have watched Daniel grow up beside his loving family..."

He paused as tears rose to his throat. The hair of his beard quivered with his lip, and he continued, "But today we must say goodbye. I'm sure none of us expected to be here. We often take for granted what we have, never knowing when it will be gone. I know we did not take the time we had with Daniel for granted. Now, we must keep Daniel alive in our hearts, and in our memories. We will celebrate Daniel as he was in life and rejoice in the understanding that he is safe in the kingdom of Heaven. Please join me as we bow our heads in prayer."

Clothing shifted among the silence and the room became still.

Jacob's hands trembled as he clasped them together. His breath was short, and his head was light. He hadn't slept since Daniel died. Not really. The blinks of rest he managed to get frightened him awake and left him drenched in sweat.

They know, he told himself, they all know.

With his head frozen in place, hung down like all the others, he *knew* that everyone was staring at him. He could feel it.

How can they tell?

Was it in his face? Did they see it behind his eyes?

Or is there still blood and dirt stuck on him somewhere that he can't see or wash off?

The noise in his head was interrupted by Mr. Gregory's thanks, and everyone raised their heads. Glancing around, he saw that no one was looking at him. Everyone was looking up at the stage. Jacob watched as his father was ushered to the podium to deliver his speech. He had written one on behalf of the family.

Jacob saw his father on the stage, gathering his thoughts. The wrinkle in his forehead and the purse of his lips sent Jacob back to that night.

"Jacob..." his father had sighed at the sight of the corpse when Jacob shakily led him to the old chapel.

It was stiff and pale, but it still looked like him. Blood was crusted onto his delicate face and cracked lips. It had soaked and burned into the clothes. The body was slumped up against the wall, right where Jacob left him. Vivid daylight poured in through the broken stained-glass. What was once a holy portrait now shattered open to look like a mouth with crooked teeth.

Seeing the body bathed in the light of morning—it left no secrets. Muscle sliced open, now cold and unbleeding. Jacob retched out a cry and gripped onto one of the old pews to hold his buckling legs.

"You don't get to cry," his father said, grabbing the back of Jacob's shirt and pulling him up. "How did you let this happen, Jacob." Father never asked, he required answers.

Jacob shook silently, trying to form the words before he yelled for them. "It—it was an accident..." he whispered, "I didn't mean to do it..."

"Who does that matter to, Jacob? Does it matter to Daniel?" He threw his hand to the body. "It doesn't matter to me."

"I'm sorry," he pleaded, his thoughts came out as coughing sobs. "I don't know what to do..."

His father stared at the body for a moment and stated, "Well I suppose you'll have to bury him."

Jacob looked to him with terror. "What?" Tears sprung from his eyes and his chest crumpled from the words. He lost control of his breath and his voice and began to heave, "I don't want to do that, Dad, I don't want to do that, *I don't want to do that.*"

"I'll get a shovel, Jacob." His father left his side and started to walk to the chapel doors.