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Picstory: second draft



My grandfather wasn't in the room when my grandmother died. He was across the hall, doing the hospice center dishes. He was always looking to do something for her, often bringing picnic baskets or crystal songbird trinkets or scented soaps to the sunlit room at the end of the hall. He knew that she would be full after a few forced bites of a peach, knew she couldn't bear to look in the tiny mirrors he polished so carefully, knew she only opened gifts she was certain she'd use completely - knew all this and chose to float around anyway.

By the time he returned to Room 401, after the hospice supervisor had again insisted that Grandpa, as a visitor, had no contractual dishwashing obligations, she already passed away. The gifts were still neatly wrapped.

After the small ceremonial service, we took Grandpa to Seattle. We were staying with friends, who Mom and Dad asked to be cautious. But I didn't know how to approach Grandpa myself. What do you do when a loved one pokes around a plate but eats nothing? It was our first trip without Grandma singing karaoke in the back of the car. I was afraid of making allusions and mentioning the past. Instead, I tripped into the future, talking without listening to keep his mind light, unsure of how to bridge the in-between tenses. He didn't comment when I pointed at the waves. He stood off, tracing the driftwood with his shoe.

After a while, crouched on the beach, he picked up a stone. It was rounded, smoothed over time in the palms of waves, but still weighted. Grandpa turned it over in his own hands and smiled.