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## All That Remains

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# ALL THAT REMAINS

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MEGHAN LARGENT

“Do you mind if we stop for a quick visit?”  
my father asks—  
so we pull into the memorial park  
and follow a path only he remembers.  
I watch the markers as we pass them  
each bearing a well-meaning allusion  
meant to guide us:  
Faith  
Good Shepherd  
God’s Garden.  
Just past the Last Supper we park  
falling into silence beneath a cluster of outstretched  
winter trees that offer with skeletal arms  
their somber reverence.  
My father turns off the car  
and stares out the window for a moment  
watching the motionless grave plaques  
searching for something  
maybe—  
then abruptly says:  
“Are you ready?”

My answer is no  
but it wasn't really a question.  
Grass and stray branches snap underfoot  
as we wend our way between faded old graves  
names carved on their surfaces—  
but no faces.  
No lives.  
I don't know these people  
(the sound of their laughter  
their childhood memories  
dreams lost and achievements gained  
and all their secret regrets)  
beyond the flat cold metal  
imprinted with the years they lived  
and a name to accompany:  
Tessa Lance  
Billie Sargent  
Imogene Schirr.

We stand over Eugene and Verda  
my father's parents  
interred only fourteen years apart  
now covered by the dead grass  
and smothering dirt of many more.  
What is left to call them ours?  
Perhaps a bone or two hidden deep below  
still bears DNA like mine  
and maybe their names will

bring back long-forgotten memories—  
but nothing  
will bring them back.  
This is no visit like those I made with  
my father every Saturday when I was young  
to watch football and play that old  
Wheel of Fortune handheld on my grandpa's lap  
feeling his laughter rumble against my back.  
This will not give me time with a grandmother  
who died when I was months old  
and whose face I know only from old photographs  
and repeated stories  
each as worn and colorless as the next.

My father looks down at me  
eyes full of the old sadness  
he's carried for years—  
and I imagine that I too will  
carry that same sadness someday  
when he is no more than a name on a grave.  
Or will I someday forget him  
(the crinkled smiles and deadpan puns  
the repeated stories and apologies when  
he can't remember which ones he's already told  
the firm safety of his embrace)  
the way all those below us have been  
forgotten in all but name?  
Perhaps someday

he will become no more real to me  
than the metal nameplates above  
my grandparents' withered bones  
and the fading memories that accompany.

"Are you ready?"  
he asks again  
voice muted in obligatory reverence.  
As we walk back to the Jeep  
I wonder just how deep into the cemetery mud  
we've already sunk—  
how many graves we have stepped into  
during this short visit  
and in which ones we will  
remain.