

## THE FUNERAL DIRECTOR'S DAUGHTER

The bright orange leaves that sang with the wind of November carried the first cries of a baby. They carried her cries as a song across the purple sky on that Tuesday night. A baby that would be known as the funeral director's daughter. It is a funny picture to imagine; the image of the man who typically held hands with death now found himself kissing the forehead of his exhausted wife and intertwined his fingers with life. He found himself in a world he didn't know or quite understand. His first baby and his first breath of life in quite some time. Almost like he finally came up for air after swimming in an eternity of death. But this is not a story of the funeral director. Rather, a story of the baby who sent her parents to the cool hallways of the hospital early that Tuesday morning. I think she knew what was to lie at the face of a world too big for her. Maybe she was terrified or maybe she knew she would always feel small. Maybe she was not ready to enter into the home that held death, just as her father did. Maybe she knew that her cry would continue to carry as she waited to enter into the world with a blood-curdling cry until later that evening. A new mother ready for relief and to hold her daughter, and a father ready for a taste of life, waited what felt like forever that Tuesday in November. They waited, anticipating a baby that would have her nose and his eyes. They waited and were finally pierced with her cry that the November leaves then picked up and carried as their song; a song that they carry each November.

The baby that came into the small hospital room soon calmed down. The mother and father weren't sure if she had her nose that sometimes felt a little too big or his light eyes that would sometimes change with the shirt he wore. She didn't really look like anyone; just a simple baby. They loved her, nonetheless. They loved her and they took her home — to the funeral home. This baby was lucky they took her home on that specific Thursday afternoon. Instead of

being engulfed by silence and the nervous pitter patters of her parent's hearts, she was swarmed with smells of a Thanksgiving feast and the chatter of people her new eyes could not yet recognize. She was passed around as if she was a new miracle in this big world. Soon, her bare head would sprout curly brown locks, her blue eyes would shift to a forest of green, and brown spots of different shapes, sizes, and shades would scatter across her face. She would have the funeral director's fair skin, never thinking she looked much like her mother.

For the first four years of her life, she would hear the chatter of others that would pace in and out of her home — the funeral home. But more often than not, the pacing stopped and it became silent. When it was silent in her home, she felt incredibly small in a house so big; incredibly small in a house for the dead. The funeral director's daughter would one day have a brother and for a moment, he seemed to fill the silence. The funeral director and her mother would tend to the new baby who would soon grow to have different features than her but would still somehow look just like her. When they would tend to him, the silence would become loud once again. She would find herself between walls that didn't want to acknowledge her. They didn't seem like they wanted to be her home. But, a brother with darker skin and deep brown eyes would start to fill the silence through hands flailed at one another, giggles from secrets mom and dad would never know, and tears from nights when the walls forgot to stand guard of the ghosts. She forgot, just for a moment, about the silence. Soon — sooner than she wished — it crept back in.

Isn't it funny? The place that was supposed to protect her, wrap its walls around her, and hold her innocence in its hands could never look her in its eyes. What was supposed to be her home couldn't think about a child because it had ghosts to tend to. Maybe that was its way of protecting her; by kissing her goodnight and standing guard at her door. The funeral director's

daughter had to share her home. It was never her own. It was a place for strangers to gather, hold hands, and pick out photos that held memories that didn't occur in this home. It was made to be a home for the dead. She never blamed it, understanding that it was not quite certain how to care for the living, especially in holding the innocence of a child; something so sacred. The ignorance of the funeral director's daughter was taken away in this home, but it never meant to hurt her. There is no hatred between the two. Only walls that tried to love and eyes that begged for more but knew that it tried its best. It could never look her in those green eyes and this sometimes hurt her. She begged to be seen and held by its walls. She begged for it to be a home for her, not for the ghosts. Now the funeral director's daughter is gone and she thinks about her home. She longs for the comfort that came from the sound of the creaking of the stairs — the creaking that happens when nobody is home. She longs for the bedroom where she believed the closet doors hid secrets from her. She longs for the kitchen that had cabinets that were too tall for her legs, and where plates and glass mugs inevitably went missing. She longs for her home. Because although it seemed to pay no mind to her, she longs for the place that watched and held her first steps. Crevices in bedrooms and small hallways became the perfect hiding places in the funeral home. Games of hide and seek with her brother ended in screams of laughter when the other was found; moments where the silence didn't feel so loud. A purple pillowcase sat upon her bed that was never made. A pillow that muffled her screams of hurt and collected tears that pooled into a sea of asking for belonging; moments where she preferred the silence. The red couch sat in the middle of the living room, and each time she sat in the rough fabric, it would hug her small body. It would engulf her and each of her friends in love as they would spill popcorn into its hands; moments where the laughter made her forget her loneliness. Winters that didn't seem so cold would pass because of the crackling flames of the fireplace. A fireplace that would tell her

stories as she fed it marshmallows and sat chocolate at its feet; moments where the warmth of the fire made her home feel like a home. She longed for these moments. The moments that tried to convince her that her home was made to be a home. But her home was never meant for her and she is unsure that it is meant for anyone. The funeral home was meant to tend to the ghosts that lived there, not the funeral director's daughter who longed to be held. It did its best, and even though it took from her, it still acted as a home; there was still comfort. The funeral director's daughter always felt like a home should be a place of love and a place of life. Maybe she was the breath of life for this home; for it still wrapped its walls around her, sometimes squeezing too tight, and held her with love. It never meant to hurt her, for it brought her new friends and made her who she is; sensitive to the ghosts that walk among us, longing to be their friend, and hoping that they find their home even if that meant she cannot have hers.

The funeral director's daughter lost something between the walls of what was supposed to be her home. She lost her sense of ignorance regarding a world that was too big for her small being. Just as we all lose it, the funeral director's daughter lost it sooner than most. She had to hold hands with death when she wasn't ready; still grasping for the hands of life. A curse was placed on her, or at least that is what it feels like to her; a curse from her home, the place that was supposed to protect her innocence. Instead, it became a place that makes her small being feel too much. There is so much that she isn't quite sure where to take it all. The girl tries to run from it, sometimes she tries to write it down. She tries to hide it, but there is just too much. A curse where death was supposed to be normal to her, but instead she constantly grieves. Grief became her best friend. She would grieve and continues to grieve for people she has never met, those she has known for her lifetime, and those who are still living. A feeling so intense that her small being isn't quite sure what to do with it. She grows up with grief, never quite used to its

uncomfortable hold on her. Yet, she has to allow it to follow her wherever she goes because it has become part of her. The funeral director's daughter carries grief around for all to see. Like a sore on her face, everyone can see it on her. It reeks from her body and she is not quite sure what to do with it anymore. It is still too big for her small being. She is getting exhausted holding hands with this friend that she wishes to let go of, just for a little while. The people see her face and they tend to ignore it, most tired of the constant grief. Do they not see that she is tired, too? All because of a home, the funeral director's daughter had a curse placed on her. A curse where she seems to feel too much for her small being. A curse where she has become too small for a world so big. All because of a home that was not really meant for her — not really meant for the living. She wonders if her father feels the same way, but she knows he will not understand. No one ever understands, and my god, does she wish that someone would understand. All because of a home that tried its best but was meant for the dead.