

Westminster Quarters

Sean Hogan

Midnight. Downstairs, the grandfather clock wakes up: Westminster Quarters followed by twelve sonorous chimes. Upstairs, I'm watching Cartoon Network and eating a bowl of Goldfish® crackers in my aunt's old bedroom. The grandfather clock's twelfth chime dies, and my grandparents' house is silent again, but my grandfather is awake somewhere in the silent house, and he's waiting for me to find him. I always know that he's awake and waiting for me. I open the bedroom door. The hallway is dark, and my family is sleeping behind locked doors: my parents, sisters, grandmother, aunts, cousins, and uncle. I should know that I'm dreaming: my uncle died when I was four. But I have no memories of him, so my subconscious has no way to recreate him; as I walk by his door, I'm only aware of *Uncle*: an eye-floater identity, an echo of an echo, a shadow of a memory. If I remembered my uncle, I'd realize that I'm dreaming, but his nebulous presence is a slack tripwire, and I walk down the hallway. I stop at the top of the stairs. I can sense the totality of my grandparents' house: the thrumming refrigerator, the dripping showerheads, the hearth still warm from the nightly fire. I descend the stairs and knock on the door of my grandfather's study. "Come in", he says, and the door opens. He's sitting at his oaken roll-top desk. He looks up from his book and smiles, and the dream cracks.

My grandfather is dead. He died while we were driving to his deathbed. I remember the funeral, and I remember the construction worker who solemnly removed his helmet as the hearse drove by, and I remember how our family splintered after his death—

"Grandpa? I thought you died", I say. *This can't be real. I remember—*

"I'm not dead. I'm right here."

"But how could I be wrong about something like that?" *Am I wrong?*

"It's okay to be wrong."

"But you've been gone for so long." *It's okay to be wrong.*

"I'm here now," he says, and I believe him. I always believe him.

I fall into the dream, and my grandparents' house splits time like a prism splits light. I'm in the backyard with my sisters and cousins catching fireflies, and I'm in the basement with my grandfather making a birdhouse in his carpentry workshop. I'm eating rice pudding in the kitchen with my grandmother, and I'm eating Sunday-morning pancakes in the dining room with my family. I'm showering upstairs, and I'm reading *Calvin and Hobbes* downstairs.

But now the dream is dissipating, and my memories are fading. Darkness surrounds my grandparents' house. I'm still with my grandfather in his study, but I'm also outside with my cousin climbing the crabapple tree. I look up at the Moon through the leaves, and then the Moon disappears. I disappear with my cousin and the crabapple tree. I disappear, and I disappear, and I disappear as my memories fade. I disappear until I'm only with my grandfather in his study. My grandfather says something, but I can't understand him. "I can't understand—"

I wake up, and my grandfather is dead again. I try to remember my grandfather's voice before the dream dissipates completely, but I always fail. I'll try harder next time. I open

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my dream journal and write about climbing the crabapple tree, adding it to the memories I've retrieved from this dream. I turn to the last entry about this dream: *September 20, 2018—i cut a piece of carpet from the corner of my grandpa's study. i woke up clutching nothing.* I'm having this dream less frequently. I'm terrified. I hate this dream—waking up hurts so much—but I don't want to lose my grandfather forever. I need this dream. I need him.