

Sammy

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Summertime was always my favorite as a child, but I'm not a child anymore.

During my childhood, my mother would drive my sister and I up to the beach house. We'd spend the summer hunting for seashells and skipping stones across the waves while Mom would gather wood for us to roast the fish Dad caught at work. It was perfect. It made leaving once Labor Day rolled around that much harder.

For years, in the middle of summer when the nauseous heat clung to the undersides of our bones, our mother's brother would come to visit. He'd arrive in the dead of night, the only time the heat was tempered by the promise of morning dew still smokey from the previous evening's campfire. His bags were so heavy, the straps dug into his shoulders in such a painful manner. The long tubes of iron hidden within the zippers and pockets rattled against his femur with each uneven step he took.

I always loved when he'd visit. As a small child, I'd run up to him and throw myself into his arms. There was something about his deep laugh that felt so comforting to me. Maybe it was only mid-embrace when I heard him laugh like that. We'd spin around, and once he'd set me down, he'd wrap his tri-colored polyester around me. I'd wear it so proudly—running around the house with it waving like a flag behind me.

He'd put his bags in the guest bedroom and give my mother an apple pie. It was cinnamony and sweet, but the doughy crust was salty. It flaked apart in my mouth and melted on my tongue. Mom would scold my sister and me for sneaking pieces of it before dinner, but our uncle would just smile and slide us slivers under the table.

He'd leave dirty finger prints on our mother's white plates. He always smelled like charcoal and sulfur, and no matter how many times he said he'd washed and changed, the dark powder remained under his nails and behind his ears.

Today, my uncle wakes me from my uneasy sleep. Seventeen years old, and I had long since outgrown the twin-sized mattress my mother bought for me the first summer we had the beach house. He beckons me to come hither, to follow him out to the beach. Rubbing my face, I stumble behind him. The sand is cool from the morning dew beading on the few strands of grass out this close to the ocean. Twilight still lingers, but the dawn is creeping up off of the horizon and

bringing the brilliant sun with her monstrous, muggy heat. He is sitting near the water, his legs and the waves all white with foam. I sit next to him, shivering until he strong arms me against him. My uncle points towards the sky where we can see birds fly across the dying dark blue –red cut through sky with white underbellies, chirping as they dance around each other’s beady hawk-eyes and eagle-like talons. His tight grasp is warm against the perilous winds rolling off of the waves, but it makes me think of when I would watch him and my sister huddled up on the shore all those summers ago.

As a child, I watched him wake my sister from her slumber every July, and they’d sit with the sand sparkling around them with the first light of dawn. There are still divots from my eager fingernails in the wood panelling of my window from when I would watch.

But, Liberty left so long ago.

Now, it’s just Uncle Sammy and me underneath an endless skyway.

Up close, and with the morning fog lifting up towards the fading smoke, Sammy doesn’t look how he did from my bedroom window all those golden years ago. His smile has hardened and his top hat has grown askew. Even his apple pie recipe has changed, and the changes remain unpardoned.

The iron barrels he keeps hidden under his bed no longer make my home feel as sweet, and the draft is to come sweeping through my house soon. I know Sammy will take me away as coldly and swiftly as he took all the other boys in our family. It will not be slow and searing like my sister’s departure.

As children, he promised her and I that as long as we stood with God in our hearts and him in our hands, we’d never fall. But, I fear I cannot trust in our bond anymore; I don’t feel safe nor brave in his arms. Yet, I long for the summers when I was a child with Liberty by my side. It pains me to say I do not love summertime anymore.