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Ice Trays

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This is what it must feel like to kiss the sidewalk, I thought as I pressed my lips to his stubbled cheek. Anymore, he wouldn't get up from the davenport. I wondered if he ever moved. Each time I walked in, he wore the same white t-shirt and sweatpants. More stains on the threadbare cotton. Red sauce. A tiny curl of bologna. His feet were blue-veined, pale—the knuckles on them ash-white. The couch looked rusted. Collapsed beneath him, the springs were giving way, cushions welcoming him to something invisible, something beyond all of this. Ten years old, I didn't know what it meant when my father told me that grandpa's girlfriend died. It's not that I didn't notice that Lovey wasn't around; I just spent more time rubbing my hands together. The heat was always turned way down. Coming back from the bathroom, I'd stand in the kitchen behind him, wondering why he'd stopped shaving. When the sunlight angled through the drapes, his eyeglasses looked like they'd been dipped in milk.

Winter exhaust expanded cartoonishly from the muffler of my dad's Dodge Dart as he drove away. Wheelwells dropped brown snow on the well-packed street—Portland, or maybe it was McKinley Ave.—I don't remember anymore. The sidewalk was never shoveled.

Just feet away from the droning TV, I'd sit and draw lines in the carpet. 'Origami,' 'velocities'—I'd spell whatever I was supposed to memorize over Christmas break, and then, like I was performing CPR, I'd use both hands to rub the frayed shag back and forth until my letters vanished.

And somehow, though it is always December in this memory, he speaks, tells me to turn the channel. He says that the game is almost on. And I'm grateful because my fingertips are on fire from writing on the floor. The plastic is cool against my skin's red rush, and I twist the knob until ballplayers appear on the screen. Wrigley Field's manicured grass pushes out into the living room's winter light. The Cubs are all wearing short sleeves,

laughing as they stretch in the outfield. The announcer's headset looks like earmuffs.

The snow starts up again. Wind whistles against the windowpane. And each time, whether it's one of those creaks—ice pattering against the glass, winter's groan or the pop of a baseball mitt on TV—I glance back, and always some sort of magic has happened. It feels like Grandpa is staring at me, but his eyes are watching the game over my shoulder. I haven't heard him move from the couch, but now, he dips his chin, and, cradling a Tupperware cube like a chalice, he purses his lips and a jet of brown spit tocks against the plastic. He nestles his giant spittoon into the crotch of his tattered sweatpants, and gently daubs his mouth with a tightly folded paper-towel. But, after the second spit, he holds the raggedy tissue against his mouth like he's going to turn inside out.

And now, thinking about how I turned to watch him spit, a Louisville Slugger cracking a baseball on the TV, snow falling outside like sheaves of whiteblue paper, I want to laugh. Everyone knows these stock emotions—the McDonaldization of feelings. *Please pull up to the second window for your cancer or stroke, your super-sized grief.* It doesn't matter if I say I hardly knew him—that those afternoons were it. That trope is played out. Lovey isn't going to stand on the back porch, smoking cigarettes in the snow, and so everyone's car radio sings "Lovey Lovey Lovey" during long stretches in the midnight dark. All of it—it's already been done and better than this. All grandfathers have those spider-veined cheeks. A rolled-up pouch of Red Man on the side table. It doesn't matter that your fingertips always feel like they've been caressing dry ice, that you're never again going to clip your toenails. As soon as you hear the voice over the phone, you already know who's dead.