



Flash Nonfiction: Not Forgotten, Another Glimpse into the Funeral Industry

Description

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Being in the death profession, I am often asked what the “worst” kind of funeral is. Is it a service for an infant, or a ninety-year-old man leaving behind his wife of seventy years? Is it a suicide? A murder? Which is the worst? Which is the saddest?

I can tell you one thing – there is no comparison to these. I don’t cry often at funerals – I do my best to separate my emotions from work – but I have wept at both the service of a middle-aged man and at the grave of a three-year-old child. As a young apprentice, I remember the distinct wailing of a mother who lost her son to a freak accident, and I snuck off to the bathroom to shed clandestine tears myself.

It is wrong to compare deaths, in my opinion; each life matters just as much as the next.

But there is a special type of hollow melancholy that occurs when there is no one to grieve for a person who has died – or when there is an unapologetic apathy emanating from the next-of-kin.





I am reminded of Hannah.* Hannah was twenty-one and had her life ahead of her when she cut it short with a knife to her wrists. Her parents purchased a simple cremation without services and gave the unwanted ashes to Hannah's aunt.

Another man – a ninety-year-old veteran – passed away one spring morning. His family paid for a full traditional service, but didn't come to the funeral. Only one person was in attendance. My staff and I stood in the back and watched as the flag was folded and presented to no one. We then drove him to the cemetery where the minister presented the committal service to a row of empty chairs.

I cannot judge how one grieves – or, alternatively, how one doesn't. All I can do is carry the sadness that has been assigned to me for a little while like a child who was gifted a flower. When the flower wilts, I know my time of second-hand grief has ended, and it is up to me to remember the decedent's name if no one else will.

However, my arms are getting tired from all these flowers.

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