

The day my old man died, I wrapped him up in a big blue tarp I found bunched up in the back of my shed, tossed him in the bed of my truck, and took off driving towards Jerry's house. I'd found my old man that morning, slumped in my tattered navy recliner, his stomach stuck out like a bullfrog's. His mouth hung slightly open. His eyes were wide white saucers. He looked pathetic. Just my luck that he'd kick the bucket under my watch. He'd probably planned it that way. I considered taking him out to the yard to burn him up right then, but when I thought about it: his smell thickening the air, his skin turning brittle, then turning to ash, I knew I didn't have the stomach for it.

A funeral was out of the question. I didn't have the money and even if I did, my old man would've slapped me silly for such a waste. Besides, I knew Jerry'd help me out. Jerry was a crazy son of a bitch--he'd killed people, and wasn't shy about saying so--but family meant something to him. Unlike those shitheads who would tuck tail if I ever showed up on their doorsteps. They looked down on Jerry, but I liked him. I'd always liked him.

I grabbed a bottle of JD and a bag of junk and stuck them in the truck's cupholders before I got going. With three hours of driving ahead of me, I had to make sure I stayed in good spirits.

I swung the door open and called out Jerry's name, but all I got was a couple grunts from his pet grizzly Eddy. Jerry'd bought Eddy as a cub, so little you could cradle him like a baby. But Jerry treated him better than he treated his own kids, even washed him with the finest women's shampoo you could buy at Walmart, so he always smelled like flowers or mowed grass. Eddy shuffled over to the door and sniffed at my shirt. He was wary of me; animals can smell death. Eddy could be violent, of course--he'd taken a nasty bite out of Jerry's buddy Father Tom--but he

was usually calm around family. Still, I wanted to keep an eye on him, so I backed into the living room then turned to see Jerry, hand wrapped around a beer, watching the news on his shitty old television. He grabbed the remote and turned off the TV. All was silent save for the heavy footfalls of Eddy lumbering around the kitchen.

Jerry didn't even look at me. He said: "If you need money, you ain't gonna get it from me."

I ignored this and sat my ass next to Jerry on the couch. "Well," I said, "The old man finally bit it."

After grumbling at me for being a cheapskate, Jerry searched the shed for some sort of netting he said would work to lower my old man while I tore through the large supply of warm beer in his kitchen. He returned with the netting, a couple of shovels and thank God, another bottle of Jack, then drove us out to the woods in his four-wheeler, my old man bumping along in the back. We dug in silence for an hour or so, my arm-flesh feeling like it might melt right off the bone it was hurting so bad. The pain wasn't the worst thing, though. It didn't leave room for me to think of much else. When we finished digging, Jerry and I grabbed the corpse and sort-of plopped him down on the netting. I stood back and watched while Jerry grunted and dragged him a ways. I remembered I should probably help, so I grabbed onto the other side and we pulled my dad over the open earth. We started lowering him and it got windy all of a sudden and the tarp flipped open and it'll make me sound like a pussy to say it but when I saw my dad there looking not even like a person, just some stupid blue lump, my arms just numbed, they really turned numb and dropped right to my side. There was this thick crunching sound, and Jerry started

cursing, and he handed me the bottle, saying he wanted his fucking net back. I started drinking and wouldn't you know it, it started raining too.

I opened my eyes to a dark shadow of a man rising like a moon from the grave, the grave, my dad's grave. My world shrunk, the shadow sharpened. That bastard. He wouldn't die, I should've known he wouldn't die. It was all some fucking joke he'd played on me. Well he didn't know it yet, but it would be his last. Sheets of rain hit the ground like fists. I lifted the shovel from the earth, then swung it towards my father's skull. His arms whirled like a merry-go-round as he dropped backwards into the ground. I sank into the muck beneath me. If I didn't keep going, it would swallow me whole. I held tighter to the wooden handle. I shovelled and shovelled.

You've gotta let go, I kept screaming. You've gotta let go. It was his time, whether he knew it or not. I kept shovelling. If I moved quick enough, I'd be rid of him forever. I was only trying to let go. A roar like thunder sounded somewhere behind me. I kept shovelling. The roar came again, and I couldn't hear too well over the rain, but I thought this time it sounded more like a roar than thunder. Another roar rang out, like the roar of a bear. Jerry's bear? Where was Jerry? I stopped shovelling. The dark peeled back and I saw it: Jerry half buried in the ground, tangled up in the grave with my father's filthy corpse. Gripped by a sudden burst of strength, I clambered down into the hole and slung Jerry onto my back, gagging and weeping as I muscled us out.

I hurled him onto the cold wet ground above and cupped his face in my hands like he was a child. A patch of red grew out of the side of his skull, but two fingers to his neck revealed a

faint pulse beneath the skin. I wondered if he would remember what happened. I wondered if he would kill me for it. I smoothed down his bloody hair then noticed our bottle half empty at the lip of the grave. I tossed the bottle down to my old man. He would need it where he was going.

I heard rustling behind me, and turned to see Eddy staring at me with beady black eyes. I thought, *I'm dead*. I waited for the snarl, the bite that never came. Eddy's big dumb face held no sign of anger. I just about shook with rage watching him--that was Jerry there, Eddy's dad there all crooked and limp and helpless, and Eddy didn't seem to feel a thing. The fucking beast. I screamed like an animal, hoping to provoke him. He looked at me for a moment longer, his expression unchanging, then turned his hulking body and padded away towards home.