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DECEMBER 12TH, 2014

Jared Sebastian

In my grandmother's house, there is now a Christmas tree. I sit on the couch watching her spin in slow, crippled circles, adorning her dining room with insect-like accuracy.

"I used to be able to do a lot more, but now I just get so tired."

My grandmother says she has sixty-four minute teapot ornaments for the tree. She sets apart a whole section of the tree for them with a chain of white frills in the shape of a triangle (see def.: anointed). I am to hang up white ribbons (outside of the Temple) as she sets to work selectively placing the teapots (a crystal one from Bobby and Cheryl sits in front of a glowing green bulb to sparkle; the first one ever hung, on their very first tree in the 50's, gold, paint-chipped; one that belonged to her mother, over a hundred years old, doesn't seem to have aged a day) shards of time cross her vaselined hands to be placed to shine in the glory of remembrance. She says that teapots represent hospitality, that's why she hangs them on the tree. Mentions the ornament made to look like two Starbucks paper mugs, one bearing her name, the other bearing the name of her second husband, who sits in the TV room watching Westerns, a giant sack of a gibbering retired cop. My grandmother calls him velvet-wrapped steel. He bought me a car, said it's because I've kept the faith (I abashedly nod my head). Then my grandmother says quietly, of course, she has the other one, too. Shows me a teapot ornament made to look like it's made out of gingerbread, holding a picture of my grandmother and her first husband, my grandfather. She sets it back carefully on a bottom branch.

"That's a hard thing to go through."

She tells me he is a good man, her current husband. She sounds like a car salesman in a showroom, like my mom does sometimes with her new husband. We go into the basement to get more boxes. There on the shelves are Mason jars packed with vomit-green fingers of beans, dirt orange and olive relish. One packed with what looks to be pickled vulvas and labia majoras. These bright jars form the wallpaper of my childhood memory of this house. Tired, my grandmother desists her decorating. I fall asleep on the couch. I wake to the sound of the radio coming from her bedroom and a live presentation of a radio show from the TV. The soundscape forms geologic layers, tectonic plates shifting and grinding together, moaning and trying to make sense—the scattering of languages unable to comprehend, lost in the endless sea of the unmeaning of things, robots talking to each other, occupying a void, the world's greatest tragic play taking place, and it has no audience. My grandmother sits me down and half-commands me to eat some cookies and English toffee. The milk is thick and rich. On the table is a baby doll she bought for her granddaughter, my niece. The elastic bands in the box make it look like it's being strangled while smiling cherubically. Recluse me, I slurk off again to the basement. They don't know I hear, but they talk about me and my something of a girlfriend.

"You know, I've been thinking. I just don't know how they can't find a church," says her husband. I wonder if my grandfather would ever say that, and if so, should I even miss him? Skin burns. My grandmother and him speak and see as though the whole world around them is slipping into hell and dancing in glee. They listen to other grandmothers, wives of popular pastors, on radio shows that warn of Communist presidents, and speak of the men who flew planes into "the World uh-Tower Trade Centers," men who had devoted themselves to a cause beyond death, beyond whatever human toll their mission would bring, because of unwavering faith that there is no god but their God.

I am buried under the weight and groaning of my grandmother's house, in which there is now a Christmas tree, upon which hangs tiny teapots, weighing a hundred tons each.