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Round Heels: Round Heels

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"He was a wonderful man, Dot," they all said as they filed through the door. "A close friend and so handsome even in death," they said as they peered into the casket set up in the spare bedroom. Sometimes they'd touch the pressed lapel of his gray suit; other times they'd just stand and stare down, their bottom lips so low you could step on them."

Cover Page Footnote

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Round Heels Round Heels

By Lisa Sinkovitz

"He was a wonderful man, Dot," they all said as they filed through the door. "A close friend and so handsome even in death," they said as they peered into the casket set up in the spare bedroom. Sometimes they'd touch the pressed lapel of his gray suit; other times they'd just stand and stare down, their bottom lips so low you could step on them.

Afterwards, they all filed out to the kitchen to eat the food my grandmother had laid out on the dining room table. Finished with their mourning, they ate. Lebanon bologna, ring bologna, German bologna and cheese. With mustard drying and cracking at the sides of their mouths, they talked about the old times.

Licking his fingers, old Doc Schreadley told about the time Grandpa Bill had gotten drunk at the Marysville Moose Inn and tore the stuffed moose right off the wall.

"Right off the wall!" he kept saying, smacking his lips and reaching for another hard pretzel. Of course Grandma wasn't in the room.

"Remember the time he picked that nurse up in Duncannon?" Richie Keanie said, his mouth full of pickled egg and beer. "He swung her around so hard she threw up."

"Yea, that Bill," Whitney Commings said, sighing. "Fooled around so much his shoe heels were round."

Everyone laughed, including Grandpa Bill's sons who had been there and had danced with the nurse too. If Grandpa had been at the table he too would have remembered, laughed and then denied it, shushing everyone up when Grandma came in the room.

"Is there anything we can do for you, Dot," Richie Keanie said, standing up and looking suddenly somber.

"Yes," Grandma said. "You can help me put his shoes on."

Later, after Grandma was in bed, the family stayed up talking.

"I ran into her on the corner," Uncle Dick said quietly, peeling the label off his beer bottle. "I know she was waiting for me. I came out of the store and there she was." He balled up the paper between two fingers and dropped it in the bottle.

"She ran into me too," Father said, watching the paper sink to the bottom. "Keanie told me she stopped

by his gas station with a full tank and talked to him."

"What does she want?" Uncle Jim asked. He was sitting on the edge of the big chair, Grandpa Bill's chair.

"To see him," Father said.

"What?"

"To see him," Uncle Dick repeated. "She was crying and slobbering all over the place and she told me she wants to

"To see him," Uncle Dick repeated. "She was crying and slobbering all over the place and she told me she wants to see him for the last time.

"No!" Uncle Jim said, not believing it. "Did you tell her it was out of the question?" Nobody answered him. "Think of Ma," he said in a loud whisper, his eyes wide. "Pa had round heels but Ma didn't know. Now he's dead so think of Ma!"

Later, after I left the dark hallway where I had sat listening, I went to bed and thought of her. She was nice. Once, right before Easter, she came up to me in the schoolyard where I played and gave me a bag of chocolates. "Here," she said, smiling, "Happy Easter." I took the bag from her hand and watched her walk away. She wore a brown coat with fake fur around the collar and black shiny heels, the same heels she had worn the first time I saw her.

Out collecting returnable pop bottles with Grandpa Bill and my blue wagon, we ran into her on Old Church Road. We stopped and she mumbled to Grandpa while I looked at her shoes and saw her face all distorted in the black patent leather. She tried to kiss his cheek but Grandpa jerked away and she hurried away, her heels clicking loudly on the pavement.

Grandpa Bill was dead now and I wondered if she was crying right now, her face all distorted like Grandma's had been the day it happened.

In the morning, the day of Grandpa Bill's funeral, I was awakened by the sound of the front door. I got out of bed and stood in the hallway.

Grandma let her in and followed her brown coat and black shiny heels to the spare bedroom. The woman stood at the end of the casket and touched Grandpa's shoe while Grandma stood in the doorway, her arms folded, her face more than grim.