

This Day

Peyton Gole

My makeup went on easier than usual. The waterproof mascara, darker than normal, wisped through my lashes with perfect length and separation. My foundation, which typically dried and appeared patchy within minutes, lasted the entire day. My eyebrows matched perfectly in colour and shape. The calf-length black dress fit like a glove, hugging all my curves in the right places. Even my stomach was unusually flat, though it was often bloated or uneven. My skin was smooth, nails done, legs shaved, hair shiny and curled—all for what would be one of the hardest days of my life.

I stared into the mirror for what felt like an hour, though realistically, it was only about seven minutes. I acknowledged every perfection in my appearance, an odd occurrence for me. Why, of all days, did my makeup have to work so well today? As I stepped out of the main bathroom of my brother's house, my eyes met my boyfriend's. He had been watching me in the mirror, witnessing the same moment of reflection I had just experienced. He told me I looked beautiful. I thanked him as fast-working tears welled at the bottom edges of my eyes. After what felt like another hour—but was only a thirty-second hug—I saw both of my brother's girlfriends standing there, tears

building in their eyes, too. Another round of hugs followed, adding to the tension of the day we had all been dreading.

My two brothers emerged from the other bedroom. I stared at them for a while. They looked good, too. Both of their faces were clean-shaven, smooth—except for the small gash on one of my brother's neck, a tiny drop of blood revealing itself. They had all gotten haircuts together just three days before. Their black suits, ironed to perfection, carried their own subtle uniqueness. The first thought that entered my mind was how absolutely perfect everyone looked, as if an angel had carved us for this day.

I sat there, petting my mom's cat, audibly laughing at the fact that we were late. Our arrival time was set for one, and of course, it was already half past—not unusual for us, especially today. My brothers rolled the 1966 baby blue Chevelle out of the shop, needing to jump-start it in the driveway. Just our luck. I remember the distinct “click, click, click, vroom, vroom” sound happening about three times before a loud rev finally erupted from the belly of the authentic car. Thank God. I placed the cat beside me and gave her one last pet before we climbed into the car. Joshua adjusted a few things in the front seat while Ethan grabbed the aux cord, selecting the first song: “Devil Like Me” by Rainbow Kitten Surprise. Though I love indie and alternative

music, I hadn't heard much from this artist until the summer of 2023, when I fell in love with their sound.

The drive was smooth, almost trance-like. My heart was racing. I traced the worn white line on the side of the road with my eyes, but despite my heart's pace, I felt peace. The little brown box I held may have had something to do with that. Ethan continued to play the songs we grew up with, though none of us sang along. We always sang along. But perhaps this was not a day for singing. Instead, the silence between us was filled with fully blasted speakers, road noise, and the deep growl of the Chevelle's engine. Peace is the only word that comes to mind as I think of that drive. It was our entrance into something none of us ever wanted to endure—a collective feeling of pain, regret, guilt, but ultimately, peace.

We arrived at the big gray building, greeted by a few close family members who were getting back into their cars, heading to our next destination. The entrance was lined with a tall iron fence, green vines, and a soft ray of sunshine peeking through the twinkling leaves of the big oak trees. It was mid-August, and the air smelled of lush trees and fresh grass. As we drove down the long stretch of gravel-filled lanes, my heart began racing even faster than it had when we first got into the Chevelle.

“Lub dub, lub dub, lub dub.”

My mom, grandparents, cousins, old friends, new friends, and some people I barely remembered—probably because the last time I saw them, I was in diapers—stood waiting by their cars, watching us pull in. Joshua parked on the far left side for a quick exit. The moment he turned off the car, my heart pounded harder.

“Lub dub, lub dub, lub dub,” but faster now.

Outside, complete and utter silence. My two older brothers turned to look at me, and Joshua handed me a cold beer. We sat there for what felt like twenty minutes, but was only a minute, in quiet solidarity, sipping in honour. I could hear slow murmurs over the crunching gravel beneath heels and dress shoes. I don't remember hearing a single laugh—a few quiet cries, yes, but no laughter.

My brothers and I stood at the top of the headstone that was already there. His mother had passed when he was seven years old from breast cancer, so her plaque was already in place, her name bolded at the front. We stood there as thirty pairs of eyes watched and wept. Everyone looked perfect here, too—dressed in their all-black funeral attire. I never realized how many people had funeral clothes until that day. And now, I have a funeral dress.

My two uncles spoke, followed by some of his closest friends and my grandpa. My oldest brother pulled out a

wrinkled, tear-stained paper, his words leaving the whole group in tears. When the speeches ended, my mother approached me and took my hand. The little brown box I had held in the back of the baby blue car reappeared. A realization of peace washed over me again. My brothers and I gently lowered it into a small hole in the ground. This box held my father—who was finally at peace in a place with no harm, no hate, no sadness, and no pain. Joshua reached for a palm full of rich, brown soil and sprinkled it on top of the perfectly smooth, chiselled box. Ethan followed. Then me. I kissed my hand and placed it on top, hoping somehow he could feel my love that way.

One by one, people took turns using the shovel to cover the little brown box. The little brown box that held the man who used to catapult me into the deep snow outside our childhood home. The man who blared dad-rock in his truck, playing air drums and making me play along. The man who made it clear that nothing should stand in the way of our happiness—that my brothers and I deserved this life, the one he and my mother gave us.

This was the day I said goodbye to my dad. The day the little brown box became one with the earth and the sky. But I count this as only a temporary goodbye—until I see him again in the clouds.