

## Fear the Dead

Tuesday

Aunt Maude died two days ago. The service is this Saturday. It'll be a big service, as in there will be a lot of people. They want me to do the eulogy. I said I would, but I'm not sure if I can. I don't think I can speak in front of all those people, and I don't know if I can talk about Maude without crying. There's a reason why Maude was my only friend for so long. I've always been terrified of people, that's never changed.

I've already had about seven false starts on the eulogy. If someone in day to day conversation were to just ask me what it was that made her so special, I could talk for hours. If someone asks me to stand up and talk for ten minutes in front of people, I have no idea what to say, no matter what the topic, or who I'm talking about.

Maude and I loved reading. We had a book club for two, from when I was a kid, up until I moved away to college. We started it up again when they moved her into the nursing home. We had just started *The Sound of Waves*, by Mishima. People always thought we chose strange books to read together. They didn't expect a forty-year-old and her pubescent niece to be reading *The Trial*, I suppose. Maybe they thought we should be reading Jane Austen or some modern YA series. Nothing against Austen; we read her as well, but it is something you expect a young girl to read. No one really commented all that much honestly, just my mom and Uncle Bill. Mom didn't think I should be reading Dostoevsky at twelve, not that she had ever read him, just synopses. Maude told her I was mature beyond my years.

Most people have a plethora of horror stories involving junior high. I'm no exception. When I got glasses, I got made fun of. When I didn't get my period, I got made fun of. When I did get my period, I got made fun of. When I read during recess, I got made fun of. Every weekend Maude listened to me cry about what the kids had done or said that week. Every weekend she would tell me that people bully because they're weak, and if these kids didn't change their ways, they would end up pregnant and on crack working minimum wage jobs the rest of their life or turning tricks in alleys. I'm not sure if that was the appropriate way to comfort me, but I appreciated it, and it worked. When some chick was nasty to me for no reason, I just remembered that she was going to have a terrible life, bending over for money, offering up the one thing of value she had.

When mom and dad got divorced Maude was there for me. When given the choice of who to stay with, I chose mom. I made dad schedule his visits so they wouldn't interfere with my weekends with Maude. I could tell it hurt him, but I didn't really care, I probably should've; but dad had always been an absentee father; the divorce just made it official. Both mom and dad tried to paint the other one as being at fault. I wasn't an idiot then, and I'm not an idiot now. They only stayed together because they needed someone to blame for their unfulfilled dreams. Mom thought she had somehow won me over when I decided to stay with her. In truth I chose her because dad was moving to Fort Worth and mom was staying in Mount Pleasant, where Maude lived.

It's not like mom and dad were bad parents, not any worse or better than any other parent. Nobody's really qualified for that job. Mom was too focused on herself to really act like a mother. Any accomplishment I made somehow became her success, and any failure, or acting out, became her failure; like when the cops picked me up for smoking weed at a friend's house, and I use that word

loosely, friend I mean. Everything was always about her in one way or another. Dad was just always at work, trying to avoid mom. Considering Maude was the only one who really paid attention to me, cared about how I was doing, or what I was doing, it should come as no surprise that I spent so much time with her.

I was at work when I found out she had died. I took the call, then closed the door to my office, and literally unplugged my phone, work phone that is. It took a long time for it to really sink in. I left work early. Somehow, I managed not to cry until I got home. Once I got home there wasn't any reason to hold back, so I didn't. I haven't gone back to work since I found out. I won't until after the funeral. I've got plenty of time.

The funeral is Saturday. Tomorrow is Wednesday. Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, three more days to write the eulogy. My process is to just kind of talk out loud about her, and then write down something I think I can use. So far, I can probably use our book club, how nice she was to me in junior high, and how she was a huge help to me during mom and dad's divorce. I'll have to be careful with that last one.

Jessica closed her laptop, content with her journaling for the time being. She copied and pasted the few specific items she could use for the eulogy into a separate document, to be pared down later. What she had not confessed to in her journal was that she was angry that she had been asked. She was angry because the dread of public speaking had eclipsed her grief. She wanted to spend those days before the funeral remembering Maude, and how much she had meant to her. She wanted to try to find some way to say goodbye, to find closure, but instead she was spending every waking hour dreading standing up in front of a crowd of mourners, to talk about the person who had meant the most to her. She was angry because in talking about Maude, she must also reveal something about herself. She realized that she felt a little possessive, she wanted to keep their relationship private, held tightly to her chest. It was not for others to know all that Maude had meant to her. No one else deserved to know all that Maude had helped her through. Out of her whole extended family, she had been the only one who consistently kept in touch with Maude, who consistently visited her in the nursing home, and yet this entire extended family would show up on Saturday and make an ostentatious display of grief, for the benefit of their own consciences.

After preparing for bed Jessica remembered that they'd be picking up the trash the next day. The garbagemen always came early, and she wanted to sleep in. With a heavy sigh she threw a coat on over her pajama shorts and oversized shirt and walked downstairs to the kitchen. Upon lifting the garbage can lid, the smell confirmed that, as inconvenient as it was, taking the trash out was the right decision.

She pulled the can to the curb and paused momentarily to look up at the moon. At that moment she regretted that she no longer smoked, it was a perfect night for a cigarette. The air was cool, and the moon was full. A light breeze rustled the leaves. Maude loved the fall. Jessica loved the spring. In regard to the seasons, changing from summer to winter, or from winter to summer, was always preferable to either winter or summer. Jessica's mind drifted back to the cigarette. She briefly toyed with the idea of running to the gas station, but that would require getting dressed, and maybe even putting on a bra, which at that time of night was certainly not worth it.

There was a loud cracking sound at the end of the road. Startled, she turned towards it. The light at the end of the street was always dim, but she thought she saw a shadow, as though someone were

standing in the middle of the road. Though she couldn't be certain, because she couldn't even be certain there was anyone out there, she thought that the figure was watching her. She felt it's gaze on her. Thoroughly creeped out she turned to go back inside. There was another crack, somehow closer, whereupon, in a panic she ran to her door, threw it open, stepped inside, and slammed it shut behind her, locking it of course. Rather than feed her irrational fear by peering out the window, she closed the blinds, checked the lock again, and jogged up the stairs to her room, locking her bedroom door behind her.

She lay in bed trying to think of anything aside from that figure, who may or may not have been there. Rebellious, her mind kept going back to the cracking sound. When she thought about it more, she realized it sounded as though someone were striking a tree with a stick. Since she was unable to forcibly divert her mind to other subjects, she took up her book. She had decided to continue "The Sound of Waves." Neither Maude nor Jessica could bear to leave a book unfinished. Even if they didn't like the book, they still struggled through it. Both felt that reading, even if it was not entirely enjoyable, was never a waste of time. Thankfully, the bad books were few and far between. They had giggled their way through "Fanny Hill." Been overwhelmed by the sense of sadness and horror in "The Last Tsar." Been lost in the evocative prose and imagery of Jeanette Winterson. Argued the merits of "Beyond Freedom and Dignity." Questioned their own impulse reactions throughout "The Righteous Mind." And struggled to keep track of the subject in nearly sentence of "Absalom, Absalom."

Slowly, but surely, sleep overtook her. Almost immediately she descended into a nightmare. She stood on her porch staring out at the yard. The shadow slowly walking towards her. Each time it passed a tree she heard the cracking sound. With every step the shadow took everything behind it, the houses, the trees, parked cars, strangely motionless dogs, began to cave in, morphing into a kaleidoscopic spiral. Each individual thing merged into one massive, swirling shape, their atoms creating new and ghastly hybrids of dog and machine, machine and tree, asphalt and sky. The shape began to reveal itself as a sphere, the center of which was the shadow, moving ever closer. She was trapped inside an imploding orb. Somehow, she lost sight of the shadow, but she could tell it was near by the sound of the crack, getting louder and louder.

She woke. In her sleep delirium, she remembered having read somewhere that in certain primitive cultures, widows would hit trees with sticks as a warning that they were approaching. Somehow, they carried the spirit of the dead with them, like a contagion. She couldn't remember where she had read that. Regardless, at whatever ungodly time of night it was, where she had read it didn't matter.

It wasn't long before she fell back to sleep. Again, she dreamed. She dreamt Maude was sitting at the foot of her bed facing the door. Maude spoke softly to her, saying that she would always look out for Jessica, that she would never leave her. One day they would be together again. This should have comforted Jessica, but strangely enough it did not.

Wednesday

When she woke, she looked at her clock and was pleased to find out that she had slept in. She made breakfast while listening to a podcast that focused on little known historical events.

After breakfast she tried to do some more work on the eulogy. She typed several memories of Maude and then went through each one, fleshing out the details as much as possible. She read each memory aloud trying to speak in a conversational manner, trying not to cry knowing that she and Maude would make no more memories. Wanting to stop she forced herself to continue. Once finished she saved her document and decided it was time for a break.

A walk sounded lovely. She stepped outside to check the weather and then stepped back inside to change her clothes. The weather was cool. The road was strewn with leaves. The leaves still holding on to the trees were bright red. A perfect day, according to Maude.

Jessica stepped outside and paused on her doorstep, staring down at her mp3 player and trying to decide what to listen to. Maude loved music from the 50's, The Platters in particular. As such, Jessica selected a best of album and started down the road. As she walked, she realized she was heading towards the spot where the figure had stood the night before. She felt a strange sense of foreboding. An oppressive feeling began to weigh on her with each step, and despite the brightness of the day, despite the picturesque rows of trees, despite the carefree singing of the birds, she was afraid. She did not know what she was afraid of, she just knew that she was terrified. She paused and turned back to look at her house. By her estimation she was now standing on the exact spot where the shadow had stood. She imagined herself at the end of the street outside her house looking back at herself, this is what the shadow would have seen. The thought sent a literal shiver down her spine. She decided she should keep moving. Turning away from her house she started to walk on but paused again when she noticed the tree closest to where she was standing. The side of the tree facing her had started to rot. The rot seemed to be radiating outward from a single point where the bark had been chipped as though it had been struck by something. It was then that she noticed there was not a single leaf on the tree. It was fall after all, so this wasn't necessarily unusual. However, it was strange that this tree, out of every tree lining the street, was the only one that was completely bare.

The Platters crooned "Sleepy Lagoon" into her ears, and she continued walking. She knew it was just a strange coincidence. There was no meaning behind the fact that the tree was rotting directly next to where the figure had stood, if there had indeed been a figure at all. All too frequently there is an impassable distance between what one thinks and what one feels. She told herself that there was nothing to the dying tree or to the shadow, but she felt as though there was, and she was afraid.

I didn't do hardly anything today. I suppose that's all right though. Around 1:00 Mom invited me to have dinner with Uncle Pete. I lied and said I wasn't feeling well. Maude was the oldest, then Pete, then mom. It's funny to think there was a twelve-year difference between Mom and her sister. I guess their parents had just decided to wait a while. There was all kinds of family stuff going on around the funeral, and I hadn't participated in any of it. I wasn't missing out on anything.

I never really liked Pete. I always felt uncomfortable around him when I was a kid. He was always angry. It seemed like he was trying to find an excuse to yell at you. All his children moved out when they turned eighteen, and his oldest son even tried to become an emancipated minor. I was never sure if he abused his children, but Maude seemed to think so. Then again Maude had a deep distrust of

men in general. She seemed disappointed when I started dating a boy in college. I think she secretly hoped I was a lesbian. I wasn't really surprised when she was visibly glad that Nick and I had broken up. Jeez, I can't use any of this in a eulogy.

We used to take trips together, before she got sick. I remember one trip we went down to Galveston and stayed in a condo, which I think a friend of hers owned. She wasn't much of a drinker, but that night she got us a bottle of vodka and made us Cosmo's and Bloody Mary's. I was eighteen at the time. What's weird is I still love Bloody Mary's but thinking about drinking a Cosmo makes me feel sick. I remember we took a walk on the seawall at night. We didn't say a single word, but I felt closer to her then than I have ever felt to anyone before or since. Listening to the waves, looking out at the distant lights on the horizon, all tiny ships, drifting off into infinity, I was at complete peace. I did get sick that night, and Maude took better care of me than any of my friends in college did when I was throwing up in their bathrooms. She felt so bad, she thought it was her fault, and I suppose in a way it was. She kept running her hands through my hair and cooing "you poor sweet girl." Despite getting sick, just thinking about that night always makes me feel better, no matter how stressed I am. Maude was always able to calm me down, she always helped me to center myself. She always listened. She always cared.

The truth is, I think Maude was my only real friend. I'm trying to think of other people who loved me the way she did. I'm trying to think of people that I care for as much as I cared for her. I'm trying really hard, and I'm not finding anybody. I don't know what to do without her. She was my only real friend, everyone else, they're all strangers or acquaintances. All of that is true, but I can make it sound less sad for the audience. They're there for Maude, not for me.

Giving the eulogy is sounding a little less awful. I just need to find some more memories to share. But I think I'm done for the night.

Jessica decided that a few drinks were in order. She had planned for this inevitable decision by visiting a liquor store earlier that day. She bought Bloody Mary mix, vodka, limes, Green Olives, and pickled okra. Green olives and okra went very well with Bloody Mary's. Her first sip was accompanied by a toast to Maude.

She never drank all that much, so it didn't take long for her to feel the effect of the alcohol. She stepped into her living room and turned on a mix of 50's music. "Great Balls of Fire" was followed by "Peggy Sue" which was followed by "Fools Rush In" which was followed by "In the Still of the Night" followed by "Oh Donna" followed by "Earth Angel." After "Fools Rush In" everything that played was slow, for which she was glad; she wasn't in the best of shape and dancing to Jerry Lee Lewis had tired her out. She swayed slowly, sipping her drink. She remembered Maude teaching her the two-step, the waltz, swing dance, and recalled how frustrated she was when none of the boys in college knew any of them. Setting her drink down, she held her arms out as though dancing with a partner and commenced the leading part of a waltz box step, even though it didn't quite match the rhythm of the song. She closed her eyes. The Platter's "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes," Maude's favorite, began playing. Slowly but surely her role in the dance changed, she found herself being led in a waltz. Even with her eyes closed she didn't bump into any furniture. It felt as though a soft, but firm hand held the back of her shoulder, leading her through the room without injury. It was ludicrous of course, but she could swear someone was holding her hand. Slowly, she opened her eyes and found Maude staring intensely into her face. Startled, she fell backwards onto her couch and the vision of Maude immediately vanished. No sooner had the apparition disappeared than she heard a loud crack outside, followed by the sound of something

enormous falling, followed by a car alarm.

She sat frozen on the couch for a moment. Trying to convince herself what she had seen was not real. Of course, it wasn't physically real, but it was real in the sense that it was in her head. Her grief and her memories had conjured up the image, even the touch, of her aunt. Jessica was driven from her reverie by the sounds of chattering neighbors outside, and the continued blaring of the car alarm. Standing, she turned and stumbled outside to see what was happening.

Neighbors she had never spoken to were gathering out in the street, looking at a tree that had fallen onto someone's car, the same tree that the shadow had stood next to. Jessica found herself walking towards the scene of carnage and realized that each tree on that side of the street was beginning to rot. Every leaf had fallen. She stopped next to the felled tree, watched the unknown man mourn the loss of his car, then slowly turned back to face her house. She froze. Beyond the crowd of people, standing on her porch was a figure. She could not see who it was, but somehow, she could tell it was a woman. She blinked and the figure disappeared. She remained in the street for five minutes, give or take, not knowing what to do. She had no desire to go back to her house, but she couldn't very well just stand in the road all night.

After making small talk with a few of her neighbors she slowly made her way back to her house. "That'll Be the Day" greeted her as she stepped in. She left the music playing, hoping it would distract her but found that it just made her think of Maude, which ordinarily would be a good thing. Shutting off the music she decided to watch a movie.

She woke at two in the morning overcome with nausea. She found herself on her couch in the living room, the DVD had frozen, black and white actors stuck in a pantomime of significant looks. Rising to her feet on uncertain legs, she stumbled down the hall to the bathroom and emptied her guts into the toilet bowl. When there was nothing left she retched until her body ached from it. After the spasms subsided, she curled up on the bathroom floor, shivering. One part of her mind chided her for drinking too much, while another meekly replied that she honestly hadn't. It must've been something she ate, but she hadn't eaten anything out of the ordinary, therefore it must be a stomach bug, after all the symptoms were all there.

As she lay on the floor, she became aware of another pain. Her shoulder felt as though it had been burned with an iron.

Delirious with fever, she struggled to her feet and made her way to the bathroom sink where she carefully washed her hands. Opening the medicine cabinet, she found the activated charcoal and downed two pills with a handful of water from the tap.

A few steps down the hall, the nausea kicked in again. She took a pillow and a blanket from her couch and made her way back to the bathroom. She pulled the bathmat and the sink floormat together and curled up on them in as tight a ball as she could, trying to avoid direct contact with the cold tile floor. She lay her head on her pillow and pulled the blanket tight around her. As she drifted back to sleep, she could swear she felt a hand gently caressing her forehead.

Again, she woke. Somehow her body had found something else to eject. She was drenched in sweat, which she took to mean her fever had broken, which was progress. After she finished dry heaving her stomach calmed dramatically, enough so that she felt she could venture the rest of the night

in her bed, with a large bowl close by, just in case. She slept soundly the rest of the night and into mid-morning without incident.

### Thursday

I think I'm pretty well done with the eulogy. I know I'm going to think of something later that I'll wish I had said. Some of my best memories of her are ones that I don't necessarily want to share. The others don't deserve to know.

Today was mostly uneventful, except for the park, which was actually pretty eventful. For most of the day I watched them cut up the tree in the street and haul it away. One of the guys working on it was pretty cute. Given what had happen I don't know how I found time to notice that.

I don't know what made me so sick last night, but I feel all right now. I didn't drink too much, I didn't eat anything weird, I haven't been around anyone who's been sick. There was no reason for me to be throwing up like that.

I'm not superstitious, but something weird is going on. I'm not going to try to convince myself that it isn't rational. Fear is rational, it's what keeps us alive. I don't know what's going on, but something knows that I'm grieving, and is taking advantage of that. It made me see Maude. One thing I know is that Maude is in a better place. No one else I know deserves that more than her. She's not hanging around here. It's something else, I don't care how crazy it sounds, but there is something going on. But I don't have any idea how to face it.

I mentioned the park. After they hauled off the tree, I decided to go out to the lake to hang out and read. It's pretty cold now but some idiot was still out there swimming. Maude and I used to read out there together, before they put her in the nursing home. I asked them to let her move in with me. I have a guest room downstairs she could've stayed in. Mom and Uncle Pete said she wouldn't get the care she needed, which was bullshit. Maude was spry, she had one bad fall and they decided that was it, check her in and forget about her. I was the only one who ever visited her. Mom had never liked her, I never understood why. Well I never liked Mom. What I really want to say, when I get up there on Saturday is tell mom that Maude was my real mother, she was the one who cared for me, she always stood by me. When I took all those pills she was the one I went to, and you, mother, never knew anything about it. That wasn't the only time I tried, and Maude was always the one who pulled me back. My one and only lifeline. You never knew about any of it, you chose ignorance, you ignored all the cuts, all the scars, while Maude made them her own. In a very real sense, I owe her my life. You gave me life, mother, but you left me to die. I can't say any of that, for so many reasons, the most important one being that it makes the eulogy all about me. Mom, Uncle Pete, everyone, needs to know about an amazing person they never really got to know, that's the whole point.

There was that cracking sound at the park again. That's the whole reason I brought it up. It sounded like someone hitting a tree with a stick. And it kept getting closer. Five cracks. I'm not sure why but I decided not to move. I sat facing the water, with all the trees behind me, as the cracking sound moved towards me. I was familiar enough with the area that I knew when that last crack hit, almost right over my shoulder, that it was the last tree. There was about fifteen feet between me and it. Whatever it was stood there, watching me. I set my book aside, I stood, and I turned. There wasn't anything there. But I watched as the tree farthest from me, rotted, withered before my eyes, and fell, followed by the next, and then the next, and the next, and then the last. Behind me I heard the swimmer

come up out of the water, exclaiming “holy shit, did you see that?” I didn’t reply, I just left. I know that was rude, but who cares.

I had nowhere else to go so I came back home. I thought about calling my old pastor, from when I went to church, but I didn’t want to have the conversation about why I stopped going again. He had called me the first time I stopped and persuaded me to go back. The second time I stopped, he called again, and I went back. The third time he called again, and I didn’t pick up. Religion just doesn’t stick to me. Neither does spirituality, but something spiritual seemed to be happening. Pastor Rick would listen without judgement, he’d come over if I wanted him to. I should’ve called him, even though there was nothing he could do.

My shoulder began to hurt again. It felt hot, like a bad sunburn. I thought about editing and maybe practicing the eulogy to get my mind off of the burning then I heard the floorboards creaking upstairs. Going outside was not a solution, but I went outside anyway.

In my hurry I had forgotten a jacket, so the walk was cold, but that didn’t matter. I headed towards the side of the street where the trees were already dying, thinking that if I kept away from the healthy ones, they’d be all right. I stopped at the first dead tree and looked at the one across the road. As I looked, I saw a shadow form behind the tree, followed by a loud knocking sound. Then I remembered the book I had thought about the other night, about the widows hitting the trees with a stick. It was by Freud, I think. There was a culture he talked about where a widow had to stay secluded after the death of her husband, to try and avoid all encounters, and when she did venture out, she had to hit the trees with a wooden stick to warn everyone that she was approaching. All the trees she hit withered and died. Death followed the widow like a contagion, she warned people so as not to put them at risk, according to their superstition at any rate. Something was trying to warn me, or something was getting closer, I wasn’t sure which. For the whole hitting trees thing to be at all analogous to my situation I’d have to be the one doing it, otherwise someone might catch death from me. I recall though, in the book, the idea that the dead are jealous of the living, not in the sense that they envy them. Jealous in the same sense that a husband is jealous of his wife, or that God was jealous of his people, it’s the desire to both own and belong to. The dead long for the living, they long to be reunited. This is all absurd of course, but then again, I was looking at a disembodied shadow across the street.

There was a cracking sound from the farthest tree on my side of the street. My palms immediately went sweaty. Stabbing pain shot through my shoulder and a wave of nausea swept over me. I turned and started towards my house. The cracking sound followed. Stepping inside I headed straight to the bathroom. Behind me I heard another tree come crashing down into the street, I didn’t bother to look.



Friday

It was three in the morning. Jessica had felt well for a few hours after she got sick, just long enough to write a journal entry. She didn't really like where she had left off, but the sickness came on again and beyond that, it was a journal, she wasn't writing for an audience.

As she lay shivering on the bathroom floor, she wondered if she would be well enough to deliver the eulogy the next day. Ironically, the idea that she might miss the funeral upset her almost as much as the idea of delivering a eulogy had just a few days prior. She had to be there for Maude. However, when she began to throw up blood, fear overcame her disappointment. Something was seriously wrong; this wasn't a normal illness. She called 911 and concluded the call saying that she didn't want to get up and she was ok with them breaking down the door.

The pain in her shoulder was becoming unbearable. It shifted in turn between white hot heat and a sharp stabbing pain. She was freezing cold yet soaked in sweat. Blood and drool dripped from her slack-mouth on to the bathroom floor. Her stomach was tender from the force with which she had vomited. Her sides ached from the retching. She felt as though something inside was sucking, making her collapse into herself. She was convinced that she was dying. It was all happening so fast.

She thought she heard the door open and assumed it was the paramedics. She felt hopeful, and called to them, but there was no response. Instead, all she heard was the shuffling of a single pair of feet, heading in her direction. The wooden floors creaked its way towards her, through the hallway, to the bathroom door, into the bathroom, by her feet. She felt the presence, but when she turned to face it there was nothing there. She felt a hand gently caress her forehead. She heard a familiar voice say, "you poor sweet girl."

When the paramedics did arrive, they had to park at the end of the street due to the trees having fallen in the road. They wheeled the stretcher down the sidewalk past all the gawking neighbors. They found the door to her house open. Music they recognized as being from the 1950's played loudly in the living room. Stepping inside they called out but received no answer. Cautiously they made their way past the kitchen, into the hallway, and towards the open bathroom door. Inside they found a withered young woman curled up on the floor. Though shrouded in a blanket they could see there was nothing to her, skin and bones as they say. The woman looked as though she had shriveled up in an ancient tomb, like a mummy. They had no illusions, but they still checked her vitals.

The situation was strange enough that it seemed to be a matter for the police. Both paramedics decided they would wait outside. For whatever reason, they left the music playing. They listened to a smattering of 50's classic, smoking cigarettes and looking out at the dead trees sprawled out in the road, casting jagged, bony shadows. After the police arrived, Jessica's mother was called. When she arrived, she turned off the music.

At first, she was too stunned and horrified at the sight of her daughter to react. Jessica was young and healthy; what could have transformed her into the withered corpse on the bathroom floor? After the initial shock subsided, she wept over her daughter, but there was no one to comfort her. The police and the paramedics remained awkwardly aloof.

Maude's funeral continued as planned. Jessica's mother cobbled together an awkward eulogy at the last minute. She, Uncle Pete, and the cousins all tried to guess Jessica's password but to no avail.

Jess's memories of her Aunt Maude would remain her own. After the funeral, after Maude was finally laid to rest, they immediately began planning Jessica's memorial.

“...those whom we love best turn into demons after death...”

– Sigmund Freud “Totem and Taboo”