Uncle George is Dead

By

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“I wonder if it’s cold in there?” he whispers to himself as he sits next to his sobbing mother. The least he can do is put his hand on his mother’s lap. He looks away from the lifeless, wooden box to look up at his mother. Noting the make-up concealing her wrinkles, he can’t help but think she might be next. He wonders how it would feel if he couldn’t speak to his mum or dad ever again. Who would make his packed lunch, take him to football or give him a shoulder carry? He sits helplessly, at a complete loss. These thoughts sadden him until an even scarier worry creeps into his young, vivid imagination – maybe he’s next.

He questions how it would feel, whether it would hurt, whether it would go black, whether he would be sad knowing it was going to happen. This thought makes him squeeze his mother’s clammy hand so much she responds with a false smile through her wet face. You don’t smile when you die, he ponders, granddad didn’t, grandma didn’t, nor did Uncle George and he always smiled when they played together. He knows that when people die, their eyes close, as if they are asleep forever. He doesn’t want to sleep forever. He hates sleeping. Sometimes he runs into his wardrobe and hides from mum and dad so he doesn’t have to go to sleep. But the wardrobe is dark too. Too dark. Dead dark. When he plays with his friends he never wants to be the baddie because the baddie has to die and that is something he desperately never wants to do.
He is always nice to the old people who live where his mother works because he knows they are closest to the big, cold box - the blackness. He helps them do things they have trouble with because he wants their short time left to be as fun and easy as possible. They don’t seem to mind when he asks if they are dreading it; the end. In fact, most of them say they are ‘ready’. He isn’t ready. He’ll never be ready.

He has a plan though; he knows how he’ll differ to everyone else. He knows how he will become the first person ever to always wake up. He simply won’t let it happen. He’ll refuse. When the big person in the sky, the one Father Kenneth at church always talks about, asks to take his hand, he’ll refuse, cross his arms, and sulk his way back to safety. He will never be ready.

He is always in charge of everything. School games, the toys he wants for Christmas, who he wants as friends; so why can’t he be in charge of what made his Uncle George sleep forever in the box? For the first time in his short, inquisitive life he feels completely powerless. He has been given everything he’s ever wanted in the whole world, and he is going to get this too...and that scares the living daylights out of him. He doesn’t want it to be black forever. He doesn’t like the dark. He hopes it is black for maybe a few hours and then you wake up somewhere you feel safe and bright and happy. You feel so content; you don’t miss your home, your best friends or your best toys. He asks the old people if they know if it is anything like what he wants it to be,
they say yes. He doesn’t believe them. All he believes in, at this time, is the man lying silently in the box everyone is looking at. Uncle George. He tries to hear inside it; maybe he can hear the sound of happy things going on. Things he hopes happen once you fall asleep forever. He even leans in desperately hoping for the hint of an answer – none come.

He sits back and looks around. Everyone is crying. Dying isn’t only a sad thing for Uncle George, but he makes other people sad too. He looks down at his hands, now both sitting in his lap; he doesn’t want to make anyone else sad – ever. He imagines how a different group of people in years to come will be sitting here, crying. Instead though, he will be in the box, sleeping. He thinks about how everyone in this room is, one day, going to fall asleep and never wake up again. With that thought in mind, amid the other worries he has tried to decipher, tears begin to wet his young palms.