

Uncle George is Dead

By

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“I wonder if it’s cold in there?” he whispers to himself as he sits beside his sobbing mother. The least he can do is put his hand on her lap. He steers away from the wooden box to look up at her. 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 mum or dad ever again. Who would make his packed lunch, take him to football, or give him a shoulder carry? He sits helplessly, hollow, until an even more frightful thought creeps into his vivid imagination – maybe he’s next.

He wonders how it would feel, whether it would hurt, whether it would go black, or white. Would he feel sad knowing it was going to happen? He instinctively squeezes his mother’s clammy hand so taut she forces a false smile across her damp 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 bed. 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, something he never wants to do.

He always makes sure to be kind to the old people who live where his mother works, because he knows they are close to sleeping in the big, cold box. He helps them do things they have trouble with because he wants their time left to be as fun and easy as possible. They don’t seem to mind when he

asks if they are scared. In fact, most of them say they're 'ready'. How can you be ready to stop...being? He isn't ready. He'll *never* be ready.

He has a plan though. He knows how he'll 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, kicking and screaming his way back to safety. He will never be ready.

He has always been in control of his life. Take school games, his Christmas wishlist, who his friends are, they've all been his decisions. So, why can't he just control always waking up? His entire life he has been given everything he's ever wanted in the whole world, and he is going to get this too...and that scares him. Sometimes you can't have everything, but sometimes you don't want everything. He doesn't want it to be black forever. He doesn't like the dark.

He hopes it's black for maybe a few hours and then you wake up somewhere else and feel safe and bright and happy. You are 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, but he doesn't believe them. Right now, all he believes in, all he knows is true, is the man lying silently in the box, with everyone is looking at him. Uncle George. His mother takes him closer. He wonders if he can hear happy things going on, inside Uncle George's head. Things he hopes happen once you fall asleep forever. He even leans in, hoping for an answer – nothing.

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 in his lap; he doesn't want to make anyone 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, perhaps feeling nothing, or perhaps feeling everything. He thinks about how everyone in this room is, one day, going to fall asleep and never wake up again. It's true, you can't have everything, but sometimes, you don't want everything. Tears wet his tiny palms.