

Little Brick Church

By Allyson Eslin

Every night our mother makes a pot of tea, sets out two cups, and uses only one of them. The second mug, thick ceramic with your name painted on the side, sits full of empty air and heavy hearts. I watch silently from my bedroom door, your ring heavy on my hand, wishing I had the courage to wander out there and take your place. But I can't, and I won't. I'm not you, and I never will be.

Selena, it's April now. I remember the way you always were in the beginning of spring, smiling in the way only you could, your hair curled up in a messy twist while you worked in the garden. Your hands were good with plants the way mine never were. You were always careful to keep the baby seedlings safe...a care you never gave yourself. Your hands were what betrayed you in the end.

When you died, Mom and I went to your funeral without make-up because we knew our tears would carry it down our faces faster than we could wipe it away. She held onto my hands so desperately that she cut off my circulation, her eyes vacant and watery. The black dress I wore that afternoon sits in the back of my closet now. I closed the door on that memory the way they closed your casket.

That was the worst part. We bit our lips to hold it all in, our widened eyes memorizing how artificially peaceful you looked in death, lying lightly on peach satin with your eyelashes barely brushing your cheeks. They'd done a good job; your blond curls were arranged just the way you liked them, the bruises on your body skillfully hidden.

I've taken to leaving Mom alone with her cups and her tears. I sit on my bed, leafing through an old scrapbook, rampant with anger and confusion. You threw it all away. One night with strangers in an abandoned farmhouse, tipping bottles into your mouths while you became too friendly too fast. Every bottle was another dream slipping down the drain too quickly, and the last straw was the moment your perfectly manicured nails turned the key to your car.

Tragedy doesn't care who it takes.

I remember the phone call, the chaos, the broken expressions and disappointed doctors. But more than anything, I remember this.

You didn't have to die.

I close my scrapbooks and twirl the ring on my finger. Your graduation gift, a pretty ruby Mom gave you. I keep it as a reminder. Every time I'm tempted to do something foolish, I stare

down at the slender band and remember the sister who was taken too soon. I remember the life she had and the life she lost. I remember the mangled car wrapped around a tree and the broken bottles in the backseat. But most of all I remember the little brick church, and the beautiful blond girl lying in the casket, a peaceful face that I would never see send me another smile.