

Big

by Jack Swenson

My father died in the dead of winter. Went to bed one night and didn't wake up.

I booked a flight, then hitched a ride to my hometown with my father's boss, walked up the sidewalk of the house late that afternoon. At five it was already dark.

My aunt greeted me at the door. Her face was contorted. "I'm so sorry for your loss," she said.

It was bitter cold the day of the funeral. I didn't have the proper clothes. My father's brother lent me a coat and a pair of overshoes. We sat side by side in folding chairs in a tent at the grave site. My uncle's eyes leaked tears.

That night, left alone with my mother, whom I didn't like, I listened to her laud my father with whom in life she didn't get along. I told her to stop it. My little mother, with big eyes, in her mouse-brown bathrobe, huddled in a corner of the parlor couch.

I went upstairs to my father's den and closed the door. I found the knife in a fishing box in the closet. The box was made out of varnished wood. My father's father had made it.

I took out the knife and unfolded the blade. I had given it to my father for his birthday some years before. It was the biggest jackknife I had ever seen. From butt to tip it was nine inches long. It was bigger than necessary, larger than life. It was the perfect gift.

