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TO:

SUBJECT: #12 - Who Really Cares For The Dead?

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I thought of this several weeks ago, as I lay in my bunk awaiting the prolonged commencement of what would amount to another short night's sleep.

Do you remember your first funeral? For most of us, it happened when we were young, back before the taste of death was a bitter and prevalent, caustic ash on our tongue, before we were older and He hadn't yet made a bed in our hearts.

The first funeral I remember was that of my grandfather, a gruff and laconic old man. Other than that I knew little else about him; my father's side of the family lived in northern Montana, over 800 miles away. My father, too, spoke little of the man. Grandpa Bill was always kind of an unread chapter in the family storyline.

But as his funeral, I cried. My biggest fear has always been not knowing, and at that time in my life, the concept of death, of nothingness and nonexistence, was alien. It was a pregnant mist, full of my amorphous insecurities and fears. I cried because someone once living was no longer so, and we as the still-living had come to offer up our silver-plattered panegyrics. I cried because my father didn't cry. And I also cried because I was confused, and didn't know why I was crying.

Years later, at my uncle's funeral, I would cry because I knew I had lost my favorite uncle, because I had stayed up half the night to pray with all my faith for an uncle who I knew was sick, because I had begged my family to let me see him in the hospital, but I was denied, and so I never got to be near him in his final days.

And I would cry, too, because the day of my 21-year-old cousin Steven's funeral was also the day I got arrested, and the guilt to this day has still not abated.

But I never cried for the dead. I cried for myself and what I had lost, but never for the dead.