



YOU SHALL SEE THE FACE OF GOD AND LIVE

by Caitlin Garvey

IN 1998, when I was in fourth grade, Momma wrote a journal entry that discusses her impending chemotherapy treatment for her leukemia:

Surprise. There is to be no treatment, at least not until after the holidays. I'm relieved, but a large part of me is angry. Last week was pure hell. I met with friends to "organize" in the event things went badly. I felt stripped bare. I felt as if my life and lifestyle were under critical scrutiny. It also made me fear for the girls. In the days that followed up to the doctor's appointment, I couldn't sleep much, and when I could, I had horrible nightmares about the children. I lost five pounds. I was terrified.

And now it's over. Momentarily. I feel myself being sucked into depression. I'm annoyed by everyday events. I'm tired. I'm having difficulty adjusting to dealing with these days that I hadn't planned on dealing with. I'm confused. I feel fat and sluggish. I don't know what to do. I fear going forward and having to face the treatment option again...

I can't hide from this disease or the feelings I have about it. I can't try to be what others, or more aptly, what I think others want from me. I just have to be myself and accept it, with all its inadequacies and strengths. I need to repair. I can't repair the disease or my body, but I can repair my relationships, which are worn thin by the stress of this ordeal.

I've worked so many years on improving my mind. Now I need to work on the emotions that I have so skillfully hidden.

That year, my class was preparing to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and we learned that there were different kinds of sins: big and small ones, mortal and venial. "Mortal sin is like a malignant tumor that critically hurts our spiritual life and our relationship with God," our religion teacher repeated each week. Small sins included gossip and

accidental swearing, and big sins included things like murder, sacrilege, divorce, and suicide. I was particularly scared of the “sin of omission”—a small sin with the potential to become a big one—so I made sure to tell Momma everything, even things that I’d promised my classmates I’d keep secret, like that John’s older brother had shown him the sex scene in *Friday the 13th*, or that Kelly had stolen \$5 from her mother’s purse to buy candy bars, or that Matt had forged his dad’s signature on his behavioral report card. I wanted to have to confess as few things as possible to the priest, with the goal that he would consider me a “good” person and would relay that message to God. Although I hadn’t seen Momma’s journals, I could still sense that she was worried about something—she was more irritable than usual, she seemed to have less energy and expressed less excitement when I told her about my school day, and her hugs were longer and more frequent. I believed that if God thought I was “good,” then he’d be able to make Momma healthy and keep my family safe.

On the day we were going to receive the Sacrament, my fourth grade class lined up to confess our sins to a priest who was sitting in the corner of the church behind a portable screen. When it was my turn, I anxiously told the priest that I was jealous of how much attention my parents were giving my older sister, and I waited for him to say a prayer. Instead, he said,

loudly, “I’m sorry, dear. I didn’t hear you. Could you speak up?” I tried repeating my sin, but he interrupted my plea for forgiveness with a sneeze, and then he delivered a rushed prayer. “God forgives you,” he said, and then added, “You can signal for the next person in line.” When I walked back to my pew, I thought of *The Wizard of Oz* and how I shouldn’t trust people who hid behind screens, and I wondered what was so special about this priest that gave him the power to talk to God directly.

A barrier grew between God and me, a barrier that grew even bigger when I was a sophomore in high school and Momma was diagnosed with breast cancer. The sicker she got, the less I cared about appealing to a God who was allowing it to happen—Momma’s kind of malignancy didn’t stem from any kind of sin. I cared about her approval, not God’s.

Eventually, though, a barrier between Momma and me grew, too. The summer following my freshman year of college, I sat beside Momma’s hospice bed, and as I gave her ice chips and applied more gauze to her wound, I felt an urgent need to have her “see” me. Even though I’d kept things from her so that she could focus on getting better instead of on the family’s well-being, I still wanted her to know everything about me before it was too late. I wanted to confess that I’d lied to her about having a boyfriend, and that I’d made him up because I didn’t want anyone to think

that I was gay. I wanted her to be the first person to know that I really was gay. I wanted to tell her that I had a crush on my best female friend, and I wanted to know what she thought I should do about it. I wanted to tell her that I'd been feeling lost and lonely, and that I'd skipped several days of school for the first time in my life. I wanted to ask her what it felt like to really love someone. I wanted to confess that I'd lied to her when I said I was having a great time at college and was making a lot of new friends, and I wanted to confess that when I told her I was going to dorm parties, I was really in my own dorm room watching *Titanic* on loop, pausing it right before the ship hits the iceberg and then rewinding to the beginning. I wanted to tell her that because I was questioning both my sexuality and my belief in God, I felt out of place as a student at a large Catholic university. I wanted to admit that when I texted her from my campus that I was going for a swim, I was really going to the dining hall and binge eating until I felt better; that my dorm's resident assistant had written me a "warning letter" because I was crying too loudly in the common room one night after I'd gotten drunk by myself; that I was having trouble picking a major because I couldn't picture myself existing in the future; that I was having night terrors about her death. But as I watched Momma struggle to move, and I

heard her whine from pain, my confessions seemed small, insignificant, and selfish, so instead I said nothing.

During my time at college and my summer at home, Momma failed to confess certain things to me, too: the frequency of her emergency room trips and the duration of her hospital stays; the reason my dad was sleeping in the basement; the reasons she cried every night. We both avoided telling each other about wounds that weren't visible, our confessions remaining behind our screens.



When you walk into the rectory of Saint Pascal's Parish in Chicago, you'll see a small drawn rendering of Jesus. It's on top of parish brochures on a side table. It's a classic image of him—his skin is white, and he has long brown hair and a beard. The drawing cuts off at his neckline. He has brown eyes that are looking down—he looks sad, even a little lonely. It almost looks like a high school senior portrait, but one of the outtakes, the headshots parents don't bother to put in a nice frame or order in a larger size.

I'm sitting in a chair across from Jesus's picture as I wait for Father Thomas Dore to talk with me. After staring at his portrait for a few minutes, I start to feel sad for him. Maybe he got rejected from his top choice college. Or no one took him to prom. The atmosphere of the rectory makes me a little sad, too. It's monochromatic, each piece of furniture a light beige to match the walls, and I sit directly outside an office room. The office door is closed, but I can still overhear a priest complain to his rectory assistant that she shouldn't have scheduled him to preside over tomorrow's early morning baptism. I hear him sigh right before his assistant opens the door and walks past me. I look at the analog clock that hangs above Jesus. Father Dore is five minutes late.

I can't remember the first time I met Father Dore, but I must have been four or five years old. Father Dore was the pastor at St. Giles Catholic Parish for most of my grade school years, and he made a point of getting to know the families. He frequently came over to our house for dinner on Sunday nights, and after dinner he usually stayed for the new episode of *Malcolm in the Middle*—my whole family watched it together on the couch downstairs. Often, he fell asleep during the 30-minute episode, and Sarah (because the rest of us called “seniority” to get out of doing anything unpleasant) was charged with the task of waking him up. She tapped him

gently on his shoulder, and if he didn't respond to that, she shook his shoulder with her hand.

Dore is now eighty-one years old and retired, and he walks toward me with a limp. Though the last time I saw him was nine years ago when he presided over Momma's funeral, he looks the same as I remember him—tall and confident, with a full head of white hair, a short, white beard, and glasses with small, squared frames. There are only a few differences in his appearance: he has a hearing aid in his left ear, and he isn't wearing a collar. He's wearing a navy blue button-down shirt with black dress pants, but even without the collar, his presence still intimidates me, and I'm worried about how he'll perceive me. I never spoke much to him when he visited our house, so even when he was at our dinner table, I still felt as distant from him as I did when he was at the altar and I was in the pew. I wonder if he expects that I still frequently attend church—he knows, from my dad, that I attended Notre Dame, so maybe he expects that the two of us will bond over our knowledge of Scripture. I pull down the right sleeve of my sweater to hide my forearm tattoo from him—I remember a religion teacher at St. Giles condemning tattoos as “impure and immoral”—and I smile widely at him as he apologizes for his lateness. He says it's his “off-day,” so he was at the dentist—even though he's retired, he still frequently

has tasks to perform, his “on-days.” As he leads me into the room that the first priest and his assistant had exited, he apologizes for walking slowly. “Back problems,” he says, and then laughs, “Comes with old age.”

He didn’t seem this physically weak on the day of Momma’s funeral. He didn’t have a limp; he walked steady, with purpose, and above her coffin, he held up the heavy Gospel without wavering.

Before we sit down in the meeting room, Dore hugs me, and his arms—as thin as a teenage girl’s but without any muscle mass, just saggy skin—shake a little as he wraps them around me. I wonder if the Gospel is too heavy for him to carry now. I don’t want to put my arms all the way around him, fearing I will hurt him. It’s an uncomfortable hug, like hugging the grandma on your dad’s side, the one who always notices the stain on your shirt even when it’s covered by a cardigan—the hug seems mandatory although it comforts neither person, and even after it’s over and you release, you still live in that hug for minutes afterward, her strong floral perfume sticking to your sweater.

Father Dore was a witness to Momma’s suffering. He was at our house in her final days, praying beside her hospice bed and administering the Eucharist. It’s typical for laypeople, or un-ordained clergy, to do this work, but Father Dore did it because he was so close to our family. The church

refers to the administration of the Holy Eucharist to the sick as *Viaticum*, meaning “food for the journey,” with the idea that death is a journey into the afterlife. Anointing of the Sick is one of the two Sacraments of Healing—Reconciliation is the other—and it’s performed to remind parishioners that when one person is sick, the entire community is wounded. I remember Father Dore’s face as he laid the Eucharist on Momma’s tongue—he didn’t seem surprised by how sick Momma looked, or by the hospice attachments, and he didn’t have pity in his eyes—he looked serious, certain and powerful, like he had a job to do, and he was going to finish it. I remember doubting, but still hoping, that his hands could heal her.

Even when I was younger, I don’t think I ever felt absolutely sure that God existed. I couldn’t picture him, so he seemed distant and unfamiliar. I never knew what to say to him, and when I did pray, it seemed like a chore, and so did going to church every Sunday. The constant repetition of church didn’t allow for much creativity—the service dictated our responses. “The Lord be with you,” Father Dore would say, and everyone in the congregation would robotically respond, “And also with you.” Although St. Giles cycled through a few cantors per year, they all sang the same songs each Sunday, and they all had raspy, untrained voices. One cantor was

completely tone-deaf, and my sisters and I would groan when we saw her walk up to the microphone for the responsorial psalm on her assigned Sundays. I prayed before I went to bed each night when I was in grade school, but instead of saying the “Our Father,” I usually just asked for things and waited to see if I got them the next day. I asked for things like extra candy in my lunch, an “I love you” note from a grade-school crush, and an “A” on a math test, and I saw God as just one big disappointment when I didn’t get anything I asked for.

I craved the certainty that Father Dore seemed to have. Whenever he gave a homily, his voice boomed throughout the church. The boom was like an imperative—I always interpreted it as, “Follow my message... or else”—and I remember being scared by it. I wanted to hide under the pew to escape it. Instead, many Sundays, the children of the congregation were called up to the altar to sit around Father Dore as he delivered his homily, and he directed it specifically at us. He would look at each kid and say, “You are God’s chosen one.” Other times he’d wag his finger at one of us and warn, “Listen to your parents.” Because I was a quiet, nervous, and insecure kid, a loud voice, to me, indicated a level of “truth”—the louder the voice, the truer the words.



In the same 1998 journal, Momma wrote:

My white blood cell count is higher, but not frighteningly so. My thyroid is probably the cause of my recent exhaustion; I'll pick up the prescription tomorrow.

For a religion assignment, Meaghan and I talked about what God means to me. She really seemed to understand my explanation, and as part of the assignment, put it into words and an abstract collage about water. It was great art and a real pleasure that she understood what I said.

Was Momma's God like water, something tangible but not a "person"? Did her idea of God change as she got sick or closer to death? I wonder if Father Dore, as he put the Eucharist to her lips, could gauge her degree of certainty about God, or if he could sense what she thought about life after death.

"Many things are blurry about when my mom was in hospice," I say to him, my voice a bit shaky, as we sit across from each other. "But I remember your face. I remember you being there."

He nods and then says, “You know, dealing with the issues of health and death is the hardest part of being a priest.” He runs his fingers through his beard, like he’s thinking carefully about what to say next. His homilies always lasted longer than the other priests, but he rarely repeated things—he was, and still is, judicious in his word choice and precise about the message he wants to get across. He says, “Your mother’s funeral is on the list of top three most difficult ones over which I’ve presided.” It’s second, he says, after the Barnett baby, Paige, who died at 18 months from a “lightning quick invasion” of *Streptococcus pneumoniae*. Keith Barnett, Paige’s dad, had gone to wake Paige up from her nap and found her lying in her crib, blue. Ranking third is the funeral of Father Dore’s close friend, whose name he doesn’t say, who died abruptly in a car accident.

I’m a little taken aback that he’s ranked Momma’s funeral “second.” I remember him saying, quietly, “I’ll help if I can,” when I called to ask about meeting for our interview. Maybe he feels that he won’t be helpful to me if he doesn’t express how much Momma’s death affected him. But I wonder about his relationship to her. I don’t remember it being particularly special. She sometimes laughed at him for falling asleep during *Malcolm in the Middle*, and she frequently commented on his bad table manners—he used to clink his silverware together a few times before cutting up the food

on his plate. Dore was always much closer to my dad. The two of them still get together every once in a while—they go out to dinner, movies, or basketball games. Why would Momma’s funeral rank above Father Dore’s close friend’s? But as I stare at him from across the room, I think about the peace that certainty must bring, and I stop myself from asking him why he feels this way. I choose, instead, for the first time since grade school, to take his word for it.

Father Dore shifts from the topic of health and death to his role as a retired pastor. He talks about the different religious retreats he’s gone to in his retirement and about his daily activities within the church. He says he periodically helps out at both St. Pascal and St. Giles, delivering the occasional homily, listening to parishioners’ confessions, and talking one-on-one with parishioners who have specific concerns or who are having crises in faith. But his knees are weak, so he can’t kneel during the Communion rite, and even standing for prolonged periods is painful for him, so recently he’s been getting fewer calls to help out.

He grew up down the street from St. Pascal, and he says that it “feels funny” to be back in this neighborhood after so many years. He talks about his childhood—his parents’ involvement in the church and their role in his “faith journey.” Both of his parents were very active in the church, and at a

young age, Dore became an altar server. He tells me that ever since he was a kid, he felt that one day he would have a big role in the church. He talks about his seminary training at Quigley Preparatory in downtown Chicago, and how at home he felt there. “I knew that the Lord wanted me,” he says, “and he was calling me home. I felt his presence, and I thought, *I’m not going to argue with him.*”

As Father Dore talks about his relationship to God, I realize that part of me feels desperate to relate to him, like I’m a child who wants her parents’ approval and consolation. I can’t explain exactly why, but I want Father Dore to like me. Maybe there’s a part of me that still believes he can relay my “goodness” to God, and that God could grant me happiness as a result. There’s still a part of me that hopes I’m wrong to be skeptical of God’s existence.

After a brief silence, Father Dore decides it’s his turn to ask me questions. When he asks about the Chicago neighborhood, Edgewater, where I live, and how often I go to church, I’m afraid to tell him that I stopped going a long time ago. I stutter and then mumble something about not knowing if there was even a church by me. He raises an eyebrow and then asks about my cross street. When I answer, he says, “There’s a church right by you, right on Broadway. The old gothic one. It’s right there.” When

I respond with, “Oh, that’s right,” he gives me a strange look, then rests his chin between his thumb and index finger and says, “I think you’re overdue for a homily.”

The boom begins. It feels even more overwhelming in this small room, just the two of us. He has different concerns today than he had during the old homilies I remember: “We’re getting and receiving, and we’re not focused on giving,” he says. “It’s all, ‘Buy this now at a cheaper price.’ It’s bigger this, bigger that—a bigger bed, a bigger car, a bigger phone—stuff to make you look better and nicer.” He looks down for a minute at my iPhone, which is recording the interview from the table between us. “Do we really need the iPhone 7?” he asks. “What happens to it all when there’s the next big thing? It winds up in your attic, or your basement, or your storage unit. Where does our faith come in?”

He continues, “People try to find meaning in things like sex, fame, and money, but what they really need is God.” He talks about drug and alcohol addiction as a misplaced longing for God, and then he adds, “Suicide is a longing, too. People long to stop feeling empty, so they turn to sinful things.”

As he says this, I picture Tammy, the nurse who’d been assigned to me after my overdose, handing me a Styrofoam cup filled with charcoal and

saying, “Drink this. It will save your life.” I was in my junior year at Notre Dame, not fully two years after Momma died, when I ended up in a South Bend hospital after my suicide attempt: I had ingested 30 Ambien pills, 10mg each. The thought of death was a source of comfort for me then. Tammy stared at me as I stared down at the charcoal: a black residue, ash-like and porous, the remains of the campfire I attended in the woods when I was sixteen and drunk for the first time the night after Momma had a double mastectomy; the blackness at the bottom of the bowl that I used to smoke weed before a school presentation because, as I told myself, it worked better than anti-anxiety medications; the thickness of the cement parking spot in the alley where my first girlfriend and I carved our names, not just as an act of rebellion but also a chance to declare ourselves as a gay couple, carving our identities to feel more at ease with them; the black ink that the tattoo artist wiped off my forearm as he finished Max’s crown from Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are*, a book Momma used to read to me when I was little. Hours later, long after I’d thrown out the empty cup, I rushed to the bathroom—a side-effect of charcoal consumption—and vomited up what took me so long to get down, a long and huge release, a vomit so uncontrollable that it sprayed in a web-like pattern over the toilet bowl, black matter zigzagging and striping the white

seat, expelling death and creating a mess of memory.

Dore pauses his homily, and we sit in silence for a moment as I study him. He looks lonely, and there's a kind of desperation about him. Maybe he's needed someone to talk to for a while. Maybe he's sad or even depressed, living in a small room in a rectory where, eventually, maybe even soon, he'll die. Most days he just sits with his thoughts. I get the sense from our interview that he communicates every once in a while with his sister, but he has no other living family and only a few friends. He doesn't have a personal phone, and he doesn't use the Internet. He considers my dad a close friend, and he says he's marked on his calendar when they're going out for dinner next—but that's eight weeks from now. He's missed having an audience, I think.

I wonder what he longs for. I wonder, too, what he isn't confessing to me, and I wonder if he avoids thinking about some aspects of health and death because they threaten his certainty. Does he get anxious, too? Does he stay up at night, unable to shut off his mind? Is he able to acknowledge some of the contradictions in the church's doctrine? I wonder if he's ever seen *The Wizard of Oz*, and I wonder if he felt sad, like I did, when Dorothy finds out that the Wizard is just an ordinary old man.

As Father Dore's voice fades to the background, the voices of my

memories increase, and I think more about the things that Momma and I didn't say to each other and the moment her body was wheeled out of the bedroom. I prayed to God when she was in hospice. I apologized to him for neglecting prayer for years, but once again I was asking him for something—Momma's life. And again, he didn't deliver. But in the moments before Momma's death, even after my dad had administered the morphine and she was incoherent, I'd convinced myself that she'd get better. I told myself that she wouldn't die, over and over again, until it sounded true.

I feel my face growing hotter with the anger that I still harbor about her death, and my desire to impress Father Dore begins to fade. Where was his God when Momma, at age fifty-two, was lowered into the ground? Where was God when my fifteen-year-old sister watched as Momma was carried out of the house in a body bag? Many of the adults at Momma's wake told me that she would always be with me, but when I pray to her, she doesn't answer. I scream at the silence.

Each June, on the anniversary of her death, my family returns to Queen of Heaven cemetery, and we sit on the grass beside her grave. We say, "Hi, we miss you." I don't believe anymore that the shining sun is her saying "hi" back, and I don't believe that, like Jesus, she'll rise from the

dead. Father Dore's Eucharist didn't do anything to heal her.

I think of Jesus after he's condemned to death, his back covered with lashes, his head crowned with thorns, carrying a heavy cross on his bruised shoulders. I think of the huge nails hammered through his hands and feet. He bleeds heavily, his arms outstretched, his believers witnesses to the horror of it all. I prayed for a miracle, and instead there was just that cross, and all that blood.

I can feel sweat dripping down my face as my mind flashes the events of my freshman year in college—the frequency of gay bashings on campus, the sociology professor who was fired by the university president for coming out to a fellow professor as a gay man, the DVDs of *The L Word* that I hid under my pillow so that my roommate wouldn't find them, Momma in the Maywood hospital after a bad infection, the cancer spreading throughout her body, the day I received the news that she would soon have to be under hospice care. I think about how, to Father Dore, my gayness is not visible like a tattoo, and I wonder if he can see the rage in my eyes.

I grow bolder in my anger, which makes it easier for me to ask him the following question: “You said earlier that my mother's funeral was really difficult for you. Did it change your relationship to God?” He stares at me

for a moment, and he looks puzzled, so I try to clarify. “I mean, are there ever times when you’ve questioned whether or not God really exists?”

He responds to my question with a story about a parishioner who, after visiting his mother, a late-stage dementia patient in a nursing home, had asked Dore, “Why me?” Dore’s response was, “Why not you? Why do you think you’re exempt from hardship?” God never promised us that terrible things wouldn’t happen, he says, before a loud exhale. But then Dore’s tone shifts, becoming softer and more solemn, as he confesses, “I was angry at God when my mother died.” He continues, looking down at the floor, “My favorite song from the church used to be *Be Not Afraid*. The band played it for my 25th anniversary in the church, and also for my 40th anniversary. But then my mom died some years after that, and they played it at her funeral. So I won’t listen to it again. Right before she died, she had fear in her eyes. She was very afraid to die.”

His own eyes widen as he talks about his mother’s fear, and I remember something I’d briefly forgotten about Momma’s funeral.

Momma requested all female pallbearers—postmortem feminism. My dad, sisters, and I stood before the church’s entrance behind them. Father Dore stood in front of the pallbearers and her casket, but he faced us instead of looking forward toward the altar. The pianist began playing “On

Eagle's Wings," and the cantor waited for a cue to start singing the first verse. The music must have played for just about thirty seconds before my dad had to excuse himself to cry in the church bathroom, to the right of where we were standing. When my dad exited the bathroom, his eyes were red. Dore looked at my dad's eyes, and as soon as he knew my dad had been crying, he began crying, too. Then my sisters and I cried, too, as we trailed behind Momma's raised casket down the altar while "On Eagle's Wings" continued to play.

As we advanced toward the altar, Father Dore was crying, but he also looked worried, or scared. He seemed unsure.

Now, as he looks straight at me instead of down at the floor, Dore talks more about his own mother's death. He doesn't say more about his anger—just what relieves him of it. "When I'm angry, I find it's best for me to have a routine," he says. His routine involves taking flowers to his mother's grave on the anniversary of her death. "And I just talk to her," he says.

When I look into Father Dore's eyes this time, they don't look rigid or judging like they did when I was in grade school. Instead, they look weary—his eyes remind me of Momma's eyes after her double mastectomy—and like his mother before her death, there is some fear in them. His eyes

look like the eyes of an eighty-one-year-old man, but also like the eyes of a child. He's tired from all of his experiences, but maybe he's also newly seeing, or still seeking.

I said goodbye to Momma in 2007, at the end of August, as my dad got ready to drive me to my college orientation. It was then, as I hugged her, that I realized that she and my dad probably hadn't told me everything. I could feel it in her hug—that no matter the treatment, she was going to die, and the two of them had known that for a while. Momma was not big on physical affection in part because hugs were painful for her, but when we hugged before I loaded my last suitcase into my dad's car, I thought it might never end. She was crying—sobbing, really—and our bodies were shaking as we held onto each other. She was squeezing me, and it must have been hurting her. I didn't want to leave, but I knew she would never let me stay.

I'd only seen Momma cry once before that, on the day her dad died. And I only saw her cry once after that, when she was in hospice, high on morphine, and insisting that her dad was there, in her bedroom.

I cried through the two hours it took for my dad to drive to South Bend, even when he stopped at McDonald's to get us McFlurries. When we got to Notre Dame, his alma mater, I asked him if we could just sit on a

bench for a while. Because he put his enthusiasm for showing me his favorite parts of campus on the back burner, I knew that he was feeling many of the same things that I was. We sat in silence on that bench together, as happy freshmen walked by us with new student IDs around their necks and shower caddies in grocery bags around their wrists.



Referring to God and the stories of the Bible, Dore admits that every once in a while, when he's praying, he thinks to himself, "Is this shit real?" We laugh together, the sincere kind of laughter, and in this moment I realize that Father Dore is not wiser than the rest of society, nor is he otherworldly. He's just trying to figure out how to exist

A few months after Momma died, I went to a fortuneteller in Oak Park. I hoped she would see a future that I couldn't. After looking at her tarot cards, she told me that she saw a tall, dark man as my future husband, and that I should call my mother more often.

I remember someone saying to me, "I guess even the best doctors couldn't perform a miracle," on the day of Momma's funeral.

I remember my grandma's sister, "a fat Betty Boop," she called herself, as she finished gluing on her fake eyelashes and then sat down to read my palms, her manicured fingers tickling the creases of my skin and her scratchy voice saying, "Well, sweet child, it looks to me like you'll live a long, long time."

I think that losing a parent even at an old age places a person, at least temporarily, back in the role of a neglected, confused child. As I watch Father Dore, I realize that I long for something from God that's impossible for me to get. I want to curl up in a ball and lean my head on God's shoulders while he shushes me and tells me everything will be all right. I want God to sing me to sleep. In the morning I want him to tell me to get up and make my bed. I want him to tell me that I'm irritable because I'm not eating enough, and then I want him to say, "Check the cabinets. I just bought some Rice Krispy Treats." I want him to tell me that he talked to my sisters and my dad and he comforted them, too. I want him to hold our family together. I want him to hear me play the trumpet and tell me that I'm talented and that he's so proud of me.

"You leave your clothes on the floor, you leave your towel on the floor, you leave your books and laptop throughout the house, you are cranky in the morning, you are noisy late at night, yet each time you leave

here to return to college, I'm as sad as the first time." That's what I want God to say. "I miss you," I want him to say. "Everything is O.K.. You are strong. You are smart. You are beautiful. I'm trying to figure out how to get an AIM screen name so I can iChat with you. Do your homework. Go to class. Stop swearing. Caitlin Hogan Garvey, I am so mad at you. Call in and check when you get to Katie's house. Stop shaving your eyebrows or you'll start to look like Whoopi Goldberg. You really need to get a haircut. Remember to take your vitamins. I love you."

I want God to wear white polo shirts and khakis when it's Sunday before church and he's getting the paper and Krispy Kreme donuts for my sisters and me—he doesn't eat any, he has a grapefruit instead. I want him to cheer too loudly at my swim meet. I want him to visit seven different Hallmarks trying to find the Princess Diana Bear Beanie Baby for my Easter basket. I want him to throw a spoon at me when he's mad at me for something stupid I said. I want him to buy a Halloween costume for our dog.

But it isn't really God that I want at all.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Caitlin Garvey is a graduate of Northwestern University's MFA program in creative writing. She has an MA in English Literature from DePaul University, and she teaches English Composition at a two-year college in Chicago. Her work has appeared in the *Baltimore Review*, *Post Road Magazine*, *the Tishman Review*, *Matter Press*, *Ragazine*, *JuxtaProse*, and others. This essay is an excerpt from her forthcoming memoir, *The Mourning Report*, about losing her mother to cancer and interviewing the people involved in her mother's dying process.

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