

RESPIRE

Written by

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OVER BLACK

WILL (V.O.)
First time I saw a dead body, I was
eight years old.

OPEN ON

A patient monitor, displaying abnormal vitals --

WILL (V.O.) (cont'd)
Wasn't scared really. More surprised
by how odd it looked.

EKG BEEPS synchronize with the pattered DRIP of a nearby IV.
Held in tempo by the rhythmic BUZZ of the room's sole source
of light, an overhead lamp, which flickers a beat --

WILL (V.O.) (cont'd)
Like they'd just fallen asleep in
their church.

Beneath the lamp, tethered to a hospital bed by a bevy of
ominous cords and tubes, is WILL (60s). Gray, feeble, and
yet somehow sitting upright. His eyes, ablaze with life,
pierce forward as if he's looking directly at us --

WILL
I remember gettin' this feeling, a
twinge in my bones I ain't never felt
before, that I -- all this -- was
temporary. Ya know?

Will shifts his weight, his mien not matching his frailty --

WILL (cont'd)
'Course what my Pops said wasn't much
help.

(imitating)
"Everybody dies, boy. Best get used
to it." In addition to being the most
prickly sonuvabitch I've ever known,
he was a funeral director. Just like
his old man, and his old man before
him, and just like me.

A sneer flashes on Will's face --

WILL (cont'd)
Guess he figured since he ain't get
no say, I shouldn't either. Family
business after all.

(MORE)

WILL (cont'd)
And, like he used to remind me, "You don't go against family." Which is about the last fucking thing you wanna hear after gettin'... um...

Will looks down, eyes slipping the punch of some memory --

WILL (cont'd)
Anyway, I took over 'bout a year before he retired. He was sober by then. I remember 'cause we celebrated his ten-year at his retirement party. Mama, god rest her soul, had this custom cake made -- she thought it'd be funny -- looked just like a casket. Lugs, pillow top, even had this special glaze that made the icing shine like wood.

EKG BEEPS from the patient monitor cease. Will smiles --

WILL (cont'd)
Plan was, when the time was right, she was gon' surprise him in front of everybody. We tried talkin' her out of it, but the only one more stubborn than him was her. So, 'bout halfway through the party, she gives me the signal, right. The stage is set. Everybody's out back. So, she grabs the cake -- wouldn't let anyone else carry it -- and just as she steppin' outside, BAM! She trips and drops that sucker right on top of Pop's freshly-shined shoes.

The DRIP from the IV stops. Stymieing a chuckle --

WILL (cont'd)
It got so quiet you could've heard a mouse pissin' on cotton two counties over. I'm talkin' dead silent. So, Pops looks down at his shoes, then to Ma, and says, "Well, it's like you always said, Narice. Two feet in the grave." Whole party loses it. I'm talkin' gut-bustin', my-jaw-ain't-never-been-the-same-since kind of laughin', includin' Pops. Who I'd only seen laugh but a handful of times and never like that.

Will licks his bottom lip as the BUZZ of the light fades --

WILL (cont'd)

Later on that night, after the party was done and people had gone, Ma asked me to take out the trash. When I got out to the front porch, Pops walkin' up the drive toward me, bits of cake still on his shoes. And, uh, when we pass each other on the steps, he grabs my arm. Now, I's grown by then, so I look at him like 'You really wanna do this?' And that's when he looks at me and says, "I'm proud of you, son."

Tears trickle down Will's cheeks --

WILL (cont'd)

'Was... was the only time he ever told me that.

(beat)

He died exactly six years from that night. Cancer.

(self-indicating)

Some apples don't fall far, huh? Even the rotten ones. But you know somethin'? Crazy as it sounds, I can't think of what I wouldn't give to hear his laugh just one more time.

Will smiles. Wipes his face --

WILL (cont'd)

You know I lied earlier. When I said I wasn't scared. I was. I was terrified. I tried hidin' it, but he knew. He knew. And what I told you he said --

Will shakes his head --

WILL (cont'd)

What he said was, "Ain't no shame in being afraid, boy. Death's a mystery ain't meant to be solved -- and we always fear what we ain't know. Don't. Don't let it own you. You face it. Make friends with it 'cause it ain't goin' nowhere and livin' in fear ain't livin'. Death's a part of every man's life, son. And it ain't nothin' to be afraid of."

A long beat. Everything visible seems frozen in time save Will. That's when a DEEP VOICE, calm and cold, replies --

VOICE (O.S.)

It's time.

Will falls back into the bed as if it were voice's words that pushed him --

On impact, time resumes. Will's demeanor morphs back to sickly. After sucking in a deep, rattling breath, Will closes his eyes and nods --

REVEAL - THE HOSPITAL ROOM

Dark, cramped, and no one there but Will --

He exhales a final breath as the lamp above flickers --

FADE OUT