

"The Case for Cremation v. Burial"
Caroline Bybee

I snuck into the old zoo, with its empty cages, its leaf-covered walkways. It's not that hard to sneak in, anyway, just boost yourself over the turnstile and there you are, the whole empty place to yourself.

It probably is strange of me to like to go to the zoo to think. But I think it's peaceful - all those empty cages make me think that the animals have all returned to their homes in the wild, that they're living happy, free lives. I know that they were all transferred to new zoos, but it still comforts me all the same.

And all those empty benches - they remind me of eating frozen lemonades and cotton candy as a kid, tossing peanuts to the parrots, or trying to at any rate. The trees hanging overhead haven't changed that much from back then, the tunnel with the Plexiglas windows looking in on the koala bears is still there, though the koala bears aren't.

Mostly, I think of you, when I go there. I think of you and your grave site there in our community grave yard. A neat, granite headstone, with your name carved into it in clear, concise letters. It's a saddening thought, really, to have your whole life planned out for you with that gravestone, a mark of certainty: You will live here, but more importantly, you will die here, and be buried here, next to your mother and father and the brother whose body they never found. Right here.

I guess it solves the question of where we go when we die, but I think if that is what I have to look forward to, I don't mind waiting. I imagine you sitting on one of those benches that they have in the cemetery - the ones made with wooden planks and wrought iron frames? Classier than the ones here at the zoo, I suppose, but more formal. Depressingly formal.

When I imagine your death, as I do often, not out of malignant intentions but rather morbid curiosity, I imagine you sitting there, on that bench, looking at your name.

For some reason I can never quite picture you dead as in put-you-in-the-ground-in-a-box dead. I don't think you

could ever be that dead. That's why I think you should be cremated. I mean, I know that your family tradition mandates that you be buried there alongside the others, but that is your family there in the ground, six feet under and not giving any care in the world as to what you do with your remains. It makes more sense to me to turn you into, well, you know, dust. To scatter you to the winds, maybe while standing on that nice grave spot so as to make your dead family happy.

I'll even do it if no one else wants to. Scatter you in the wind, that is. I mean, I know we never talk any more but I feel like we knew each other, once, better than anyone else knew us, besides maybe ourselves. I don't know where that went, but I'm sure that enough of it remains that I can scatter your ashes to the wind.

I mean, that is assuming that you die before me. Do you remember the lion cage at the zoo? And the lion that was in it? He was a magnificent animal, tawny and gold with the most beautiful mane. All he did was lie about on this great high rock in the sun and I wanted to be just like him. And then one day you told me that he was probably going to eat me because he was jealous and I was much too old to believe you but I did anyway because whenever we walked together with those cheesy plastic cups that they sold at the souvenir shop held in our hands, I would believe anything you said.

And I was so afraid that I was going to die. I spent the next few nights cowering under the covers of my bed and listening for lions passing by, but you stayed with me every time until I fell asleep, stroking my hair, and they never came. I forgot about that, but even with the lions, I think you will die before me.

I don't know why I think that, it's just something that I inherently know. I know that the ocean is blue, though I've never been to the seaside, despite all of our plans to go sailing, and I know that seagulls as the duck and dive are white like the sails of that boat we were going to rent, and I haven't seen them, and I know you're going to die before me.

And I know that you think I'm silly and childish and that I shouldn't believe in omniscience or whatever it is that makes you believe in predicting the future, but you always

used such big words that I never understood you anyway. I may not be able to predict the future, but more than you I know to trust my gut feeling.

Like that time when we were together. We were walking here in the zoo, remember, right after that big storm? And I wanted to stop and look in the bear exhibit but you told me that we'd seen it so many times before and you started to step forward but I made you stop? And just then that tree branch fell and hit right where you would have been standing.

You don't believe that I can trust my predictions of the future, but I do.

So I think I'll tell them to cremate you, because I bet when you die there will be no one else around to claim the body. I don't mean that maliciously, you were just always so closed up. And so they'll call me, because my cell phone number is still stored in yours because you never get rid of anything, and I'll come and take you away, burn you up and throw you to the wind. I'll take good care of you when you die.