

Deep in the bowels of summer, I lay roses at the feet of my great-grandmother's bed. Her body lay stiff beneath a crisp white sheet. The same one that would sway on the lines in her great yard. Every morning she would wake up at dawn to start her work. Boiling hot water for her linens with baking soda, preparing them to be bleached in the harsh afternoon sun. As a child, I would play beneath them, imagining they were the sails of pirate ships on faraway seas or the luxurious cloth hung above a princess's bed chamber. Never did I imagine that those same clothes would be used to shroud my grammy's lifeless body. A woman so full of life she couldn't be described as anything but larger than it.

The day after she was buried, my father asked me if there was anything I wanted to take with me. I wanted the linens. On the car ride home, I sat in the back seat with them balanced carefully in a stack on my thighs. Their weight steadied me as we drove through the bumpy country roads. I readjusted the stack each time the sheets shifted with the car's movement, determined to maintain the stack. My great-grandmother was somewhat of a collector (or, unkindly, a hoarder). Her living room was full of towers of lovingly piled table clothes, sheets, blankets. Each one bore the marks of age and love. When a hole appeared, she would search for a thread that matched the textile in question and delicately stitch and weave until the whole was filled, mended. I run my hand over one of those spots feeling its raised edge against the smooth cotton of the sheet it lived on. Its roughness reminded me of the way her hands felt when she'd rub my shoulders to let me know she was there.

- Erica Maria Littlejohn

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