

## Bottle of Wine

Peter Mallon passes into death on December twenty second at twenty one years old, a member of the royal police academy. Several men fold him into his grave and then walk home and chew their food.

Peter Mallon's grave is not near any trees. His body is surrounded by the bodies of twenty other former members of the royal police academy, some as young as he is. In the wide blue room where all of the police live, a feeling of lightness, light breathing. Everyone sitting in leather-backed chairs, calmly looking at their hands. Light wispy clouds shuttle across the ceiling like a projection of a film.

The entrance to the room is the narrow mouth of a black rubber tube, constricting and reshaping anyone that passes through, as they are forced by some unknown pressure through the tube from a great distance away and finally out into the blue room where they briefly regain their former shapes, like pieces of foam that have been released from under a weight.

The graveyard where Peter Mallon is buried fills up with visitors every week, some who have come to enjoy the scenery and the gardens, and some who only want to sit very still and be alone. The soil houses pockets of buried gas and visitors stand above the gas talking about their clean houses.

Before visiting her son at the cemetery, she stares around in her kitchen, opens the refrigerator, looks around inside, closes the refrigerator, takes a deep breath, opens it again. One of the tires on her car, the back tire, is deflating, thumps around as the car clears the main road, pulls into a side street and out she comes, glad to be rid of the tire noise, and is looking at a girl with a balloon who is trying to catch a magpie. And the magpie is wounded and keeps inhaling and exhaling. The girl creeps toward it, squats, there on the sidewalk, she reaches out, the magpie rustles a little, and when she's just close enough, it hops away.

The spaces between the graves have been kept immaculate and it seems wrong. In his long blue room, Peter Mallon gazes at his nails. Someone nearby is sweeping the floor. Soon they'll be upon him, and he'll have to get up and leave. He doesn't look around, doesn't see the sweeper, but knows that the sweeper is close behind.

As a boy, Mallon folded pieces of paper into little cubes and pyramids and lined them up on the window of the back bedroom. He brushed his teeth every night, without being asked, and scorned the kids who liked to play in trenches with rosewood, filthying themselves.

Her phone in her hand, her hair hanging still-damp in the cold air, the empty cemetery, the thick black bag beside her.

Can I help you ma'am? Where are you parked?

Oh just over there.

Ma'am that sure looks like a heavy bag.

No, it's alright.

You know we close at 8pm.

Yeah I know.

You fall asleep or something.

Yeah, I guess I did. I just... I had a great dream, I don't normally fall asleep in places like this.

Ah. What kind of dream?

A really good dream. Would you carry this bag for me?

Of course.

The bag is pretty heavy. The groundskeeper hoists it into the backseat and then stands aside not knowing what to say. He watches her clamber up into the driver's seat. She seems to be waiting for him to leave, just sits there with her hands on the steering wheel.

You carry that bag around all by yourself?

Sometimes.

You got a load of bricks in there or what?

Yeah, I don't know.

You don't know?

It just gets heavy sometimes.

You don't know what's inside that bag?

I guess so.

Well, that's a little odd, don't you think?

I guess so.

The refrigerator has a light on the inside which flicks on whenever the door opens. After toying with it for a while, she walks back into the livingroom and opens the heavy black bag on the

livingroom floor. Inside the bag is a small man dressed as a rabbit. He stands up very slowly, then turns and looks at the mirror beside the front door without speaking. She says, i've got everything ready. I know I don't have a long time, and you have places to be. I just need one more night. Isn't one night alright?

The man in the rabbit costume doesn't say anything, but glances at the kitchen, blinking.

She stands on her tiptoes atop the green ladder, trying to pry open the wine cabinet with the tip of a butterknife. Finally, it's open, and she stands aside so the rabbit can see. It's all still here, she says.

The rabbit climbs the ladder and takes one of the wine bottles, drops it into a front pocket of his costume. He stands there on the ladder for a few more minutes without moving, feeling the wine. Then he walks into the backyard and picks up a shovel.

It's about three in the morning when he's finished. He stands at the bottom of a hole twice as deep as his body and looks up at her expressionlessly.

Alright, she says, lifting the shovel out of the pit.

The rabbit man is extremely heavy, at least five times heavier than he appears. Standing at the bottom of the hole, though, he looks hollow and small, like a porcelain statue anyone could easily crack open with a hammer. Halfway submerged in dirt, he goes on looking small, and the smaller he looks, the more he weighs. Finally, he's buried past his ears, and vanishes entirely. She can't see him, and that's the heaviest he can possibly be. He begins to sink deeper into the ground, clutching the bottle of wine. Like a piece of iron sifting its way down through sand, or a bullet shot through water, leaving a momentary tunnel of disruption behind it. The tunnel opens for a split second, and that's long enough. Peter Mallon glances up. Whoever had been sweeping in the back of the room has stopped sweeping. But nothing in the room seems changed. He looks down at where his hands were, and can't find them.