
Fiction | FALL 2016

I Know Queen Elizabeth

By Andrew Taylor-Troutman

If I sit on the edge of my metal folding chair then my feet can touch the brown grass. I am wearing my too big red sneakers because he got them for me. Before she left out the door Mom said, don't be stupid no one wears sneakers and ties especially at funerals. Even if you are only ten years old, she said. I am not stupid, I said.

The sun is shiny on my neck and there is sweat sliding down my back and I can feel it in big big drops. My tie makes me hotter but this is a funeral and I know you have to wear ties to funerals. You don't have to tell me.

The preacher is reading from the Bible in a big big voice. He wears shiny black shoes and sometimes he reads with his eyes closed. That means he's not really reading but has already learned all the words and is just saying them back. I know that. I have never been to a funeral before and there are people I have never seen before crying just like on TV. I thought there would be more people here for Queen Elizabeth.

I wiggle my toes in my too big red sneakers on top of the brown grass. I am not crying but my insides are all jumbled up like a dumped out puzzle on the floor. Me and him did one with five hundred pieces. You always do the border pieces first, he said. They are the ones with a straight side like this, he said. I know that, I said to him. You don't have to tell me.

The preacher says he's now up in heaven. The sky is blue and there is a cloud in the shape of a dog head with floppy ears hanging down each side of its face and its tongue is

hanging out like the dog is also very hot. I wish the preacher would talk about how he could shoot a basketball over my head without even jumping. A hook shot, he called it. And how he could throw baseballs and footballs harder than me although he never did unless I shouted I am ready. A burner, he called it. The preacher says that he's now at everlasting rest. The preacher does not know he is my neighbor. The preacher does not know that I call him Queen Elizabeth. That's not stupid, you know, that's just our favorite joke.

I look down at my hands. They will get bigger like your feet will get bigger, he said. Once I was eight and my neighbor came to my house after Mom had left out the door like always and he brought big cards with pictures on one side and letters on the other. I do not know the letters but I am not stupid, I said. I know that, he said. And I am not Queen Elizabeth.

The sun is so shiny and I am sweating, sweating, sweating. Me and him always practiced reading in the cool shade of the trees across the street. Me and him always left out of the door together until he was everlasting resting in his living room with the shades all drawn and dark and everything.

The box in front of me is big and wide and it looks heavy. The hole that the box goes in looks deep and dark and everything.

Me and him would walk across our street holding hands and go together into the cool shade of the trees and squat down like catchers behind home plate and overturn logs and watch all the crawly bugs. He knew all the crawly bug names and all the tree names. He told me that he learned all the names by reading books. I learned how to read all the bird names in my very own book that he gave to me. I would sit next to his bed in the dark quiet and my very favorite book would sit in my lap and I got so I could read all the bird names with my

eyes closed. Eagle. Seagull. Sandpiper. Plover. Osprey. Kestrel. He had his eyes closed. Queen Elizabeth, I said. And he opened his eyes, here I am I'm not stupid. I know how to read the laughter in his words.

Right now there are no birds in the sky. The floppy ear dog cloud with its tongue hanging out passes over the sun and now there is shade. The preacher stops talking. People are crying, crying, crying. If I stand up in my too big red sneakers then I can touch the box with him in it.

I am ten and I know how to read all the bird names with my eyes open or closed and I am sweating and I want to cry big big drops sliding down my face. He is my very favorite friend and so it is my job to put that big wide box in the deep dark hole. I will do everything all by myself.

You are not really Queen Elizabeth, I said. I am not stupid.

I know, he said. You don't have to tell me. I know that.

Andrew Taylor-Troutman is currently a student in the Narrative Medicine certificate program at Lenoir-Rhyne University and a Presbyterian pastor in southwestern Virginia. He holds graduate degrees from Union Presbyterian Seminary and the University of Virginia. He has authored three books with Wipf and Stock Publishers.

© 2016 *Intima: A Journal of Narrative Medicine*