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Mourning

Andrea Lipsky-Karasz

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Mourning

Here is the moment. He is two years old. He is always two years old. He is warm and soft. He is dead. He is beneath his house. He is sucking his thumb. He is buried in stone. He is my uncle, unseen. Andras. We will never meet.

Peter, my uncle, named his first child Andrew. My mother named me, her last child, Andrea. *Am I named for him?* I ask. *Just liked the name,* is her reply. When I write his name without thinking, it comes out as my own. "Andras," I have to say. "Andras. Andras. Andras." Someone has to say his name.

Here is the moment. She is alive. Her house has crumbled. Her son is crushed. She is pinned beneath a beam. It is the beam that has saved her. It holds up the blocks of stone, too large around to circle them with your arms. The beam holds the stones away from her hair, always curled and brushed, despite the war. The beam holds the stones away from her collarbones, protruding hungrily into little wing-like points. But the beam holds her down, too, away from her son. He is wrapped in a blanket, the one that kept him quiet and secure when bombs screeched overhead. The edge of the blanket is just out of her reach. My grandmother can only see that little red patch of fabric. She cannot hear herself scream.

"It never would have happened." This is my mother speaking. "I mean, *I* would have never happened." She is talking about Andras. "They didn't want lots of kids. They already had enough. My father would never have added another. Too much responsibility." My mother was born two years after Andras died. No one ever called her a replacement child.

Here is the moment. He is alive. It is the smoking that has saved him. His constant need to step outside the door, to leave his wife and children and neighbors in the basement and venture toward the little gate. He could relax there, just like in the photograph of him

with his first car, a shiny Mercedes. My grandfather sits perched on the hood, leaning forward and spreading out his palms, dark against the silver car. *This is mine*, says his smile. He stands at the gate with this same smile always. *This is mine*. Now his house is gone. Not gone, exactly, but rearranged. Suddenly the bedroom is in the kitchen. The hallway is a pile. His son is a blanket. And his hands are empty. The blast knocked his cigarette right out of them.

The photos are gone. She left them behind. They fell to the ground. You were too heavy to carry anymore. Andras, she left you in the remains of Budapest. She buried you again in the rubble. There you are in stiffened lace, propped up against heavy fabric. You are looking up at the photographer with tired eyes. Your mouth is moist and slightly opened. There you are in your mother's lap, held tight. Your eyes are closed in boredom or sleep. Your hair curls in a ridge, cresting towards one side. There you are, with a smile so big it could have wiped out generations. Andras. You were too heavy to carry anymore.

Here is the moment. He is alive, although he doesn't know it yet. He is three. His brother is dead. It is the telling of stories that have saved him. The ones they tell in the garden. A child and a man pretending that there is still a world outside the basement. Every day they have walked alone leaving their refuge of thick stone walls, to hide in their imaginations. Peter is laughing just as it hits. Now he is stranded in the time between the blast and his first cries. He has to focus to find out if he is in pain. There is blood and soot dripping down his forehead. But he is intact. One last giggle escapes from his throat before the tears.

They died sixty years apart, my uncles. Andras went instantly in 1945, when the skies of Europe rained bricks and mortar. But Peter lingered on, attacked from inside, where tumors sprouted like poppies along the synapses of his brain. It would be too neat to say that while Andras's head caved in, Peter's exploded out. By the end it was huge and puffy, the face of a man who has been beaten, the eyelids swollen shut. Peter lost his words. Slowly, at first. He called his doctors *lawyers*. Daughter suddenly became *mother* or *aunt* or *son*. He lost the name for kitchen or hallway. He forgot how to ask

where he was. In the end, in a wheelchair, he gurgled and gestured. Helpless as an infant. Bombs fall anywhere they please. In your mind, in your home, in the one place you should feel safe, and the only place you can never escape.

My grandfather flails at the rubble with useless hands. Here is a shoe. Here is a pitcher. Here is a comb, a mirror, a limb. Here is his failure. His fingernails are broken and bloody but it is not enough.

Andras died. And so my mother was born. Not quite a circle though. He has become a dangling thread. Always just out of reach.

Andras? I ask my mother.

Andras? I ask my uncle.

Andras. He says to me.