

I can't decide what to do with your ashes. It's been nearly a year now. Almost summer again. The urn is sitting in front of me on the desk, brown plastic with a ref. number, the date and your name scribbled on a sticky label:

*Robert Julian Maguire*

The label has black borders and is beginning to peel at the corners. I smooth the wrinkled paper, trying to stick it back. It has been slapped on crooked by someone who didn't care a whole lot about the contents. There are all kinds of urns you can have: brass, copper, pewter, ceramic; you can have a wooden casket with engraving on it, but those cost and someone would have to care enough to order one and buy it. I guess yours is the modern equivalent of the pauper's grave.

I went to the funerals. They held them one after another. I don't think they meant them to be that way, but the crematorium was busy that day. Yours was second. Not much like the first. No orations, no weeping school mates clutching single blossoms to put on the coffin, sobbing out rubbish verses that they'd written themselves. No inky hand-printed notes on the flowers: *R.I.P., C U in Heaven, Gone but not forgotten*. No flowers at all. Hardly anyone there, either. Only the bare minimum for decency. Police and immediate family. Some of your mates, but not many. Just Bryn and a few others, wearing uniform.

The priest was sweating. He kept dabbing at his forehead with a big white handkerchief and stumbling over his words, scratching about to find something to say, stringing it out until the time came for the rollers to engage. You would have pissed yourself. Nobody sang the hymn, there was just this tinny recording. Nobody cried or even looked sad. The congregation seemed relieved to see your coffin going, as if it wasn't a body on its way to the furnace but some dangerous biohazard. They couldn't wait to get out of there.

I was the one who went back to collect your ashes. That's how I've got them here. Mum doesn't like it. She keeps nagging about 'disposal' and 'closure'. Keeping you here is morbid and probably unhealthy. I don't see it. The Morgans had their granddad on the mantelpiece for years and years. She wants rid, but what's it to do with her? You were my brother. She doesn't have to come in here. 'It's

upsetting for your sister,' she says. I know for a fact that Martha couldn't give a monkey's fat one. Anyway, she's not even here, so what does she care?

I can see Mum's point of view. What you did was pretty disruptive. I had to move schools. I couldn't go back there, could I? Mum wanted to move house. Move towns. After what happened, she wanted to make a fresh start. You've made the place toxic. But in the end, we didn't do that. We'd have had to move Grandpa. Not that he'd notice. He's still alive, just about, but Alzheimer's doesn't get better, does it?

It wasn't really that, either. What happened has changed her. At times, she blames herself. Somehow it must be her fault, that's what she thinks. If she'd just done this thing, or that thing, then it wouldn't have happened. She spends a lot of time sitting around thinking about that. She's there but not there when she's like that. She moves from that to being very, very angry. Mostly with you.

Maybe getting rid of you would give us closure, as she puts it, but I don't think so. The brown plastic kind of contains you. Without it, you'd be everywhere – like a genie. You don't deserve to be liberated yet. I'll decide the time and place. It could be tomorrow, it could be years from now, but until the day comes, you are staying right here, with me.

But this is not forgiveness. Don't think that.