

father wouldn't be there. How could I have my wedding without him? He would be there, everyone told me, and this consolation is actually something I believe and often feel: my father out there somewhere, not far off, guiding and protecting me. But to imagine that he was somehow up in the rafters, invisible in a back pew, seemed worse to me, as if he'd come to my wedding and never bothered to hello.

Chris and I had come to the cemetery together once before, after we were engaged. He had heard so many stories. As I told the stories, one after another, I realized that they were making my father less real; he was becoming superhuman, all good, without flaw. So, we came to a place where I had no memory of my father to prove that he had been real.

I nearly always cried at his grave because the stone—his name, his rank, the dates, birth and death—didn't let me pretend that he was still here, a missed call, a sliding door away.

But as I stood in the cemetery with my bouquet, I felt for the first time that he was there. The bouquet is beautiful and fresh, petals creamy against the stark snow. The scene is so beautiful, I wish I'd brought my camera. But what I really want to capture is not this scene, but this feeling, the one I'd been searching for through the ceremony and reception, when my family and friends invoked my father's name again and again. He is here and so am I. We are finally side by side.