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### ***14 Grove Street***

When they moved to Stoughton it wasn't easy on me. Of course I knew I wasn't the one going anywhere, but leaving behind a house I spent so much time in, watching people I cared so much about go with it, it made me feel like I was losing something. Like I would never get back all the time and memories, like moving meant leaving us behind; we wouldn't be close anymore and we would never mean so much to each other again. I was wrong though, I can barely remember Harold Street now or the memories. Only a select few still bounce around in my head, like playing basket ball on the third floor with Granny, guiding Philo's sky dancer out the window in sheer boarder, or Joanne's Tweety Bird slippers sitting outside her bedroom door, now all reinforced by the reminders of the ones I choose to call family, but it's ok. It was almost like nothing had really changed, just continued some place else. I guess that sums up everything that's really ever happened to me, that's life, I know it now. Still somehow I can't help, but wish maybe I knew a little less now or maybe just that everything was simple like it was then, but I'm not a child anymore.

14 Grove Street, Stoughton Massachusetts. I can't remember a time this didn't feel like home. I know there was one, but it doesn't matter now. Hugs and kisses, Christmas dinners, always late and gifts to unwrap with warm smiles, summer barbecues in a yard that once felt so large to me, food cooking on a grill that spent more time in our second home than my family and I had, they all happened here. All these things kept coming year after year, sometimes we all just went through the

motions as if this is the ways things would always be, there would always be another year to enjoy. We were all content, two families joint in a bond that couldn't be broken, everything was right. Now I know we have only taken those things for granted.

It is six in the morning, I am awake, enjoying the last ten minutes before I have to get up and get ready for work. My mother comes into my room and gently asks me if I am awake. I don't respond, but I follow as she tells me to come with her. I follow her into the living room we only use as a walk way, too tired to realize what is really going on. That wears off quickly though, she stops dead in her tracks, turns and hugs me tight as she rubs my arms soothingly. I know now that something is wrong and I recognize all the signs I've missed up until now. She keeps telling me everything will be ok and I beg her to just tell me what is going on. I tell her she is freaking me out, so does my sister as I notice her for the first time, on the couch in the den, directly to my right. She is crying. I don't remember how I end up in front of her, but I find myself kneeling as she looks down at me, her eyes glazed over with tears. She takes her time to tell me. I hear her, but I can't really comprehend what she is saying. "Joanne passed away last night.." It rings in my ears over and over, making it hard to hear when she explains what happened. When she is finished they both ask me some questions, something about work and whether I am going. I can't make up my mind so I just do what they tell me to. I float into the bathroom and I stand there looking at the mirror, but only because it is what's in front of me; I don't see anything. My sister comes in and finds me there, paralyzed, tears rolling down my cheeks, but I'm not crying. I find myself in the living room; I don't know how I got here, but I listen as everyone talks around me, I still don't

understand. I find myself again, this time on the train to work work, my mother next to me on the phone. She is busy leaving messages, she want's to help them in anyway she can. I just sit next to her looking, but not seeing anything. She shows me some of the texts she has gotten back, but she notices that i'm not paying very much attention. She tell's me to listen to my IPod , to help distract me from what has obviously consumed my mind, I listen, but this is the one time that the music doesn't help me. All I can think about is whether any of the strangers crowded around me can tell how badly I want to cry and then I think nothing at all.

As we exit the station and walk slowly down the street I think that this is what zombies must feel like or at least it is the only comparison I can manage at the moment. My mother and I go to cross the street. and we wait for a car to pass. We can see another, a taxi, coming from up the street; there is time for us to get across, but both our minds flood back to Joanne and we decide to wait a little longer. As it speeds past us , my heart skips a couple beats and I want to vomit; I can't imagine what she must have felt as she saw it coming.

It is four in the afternoon, we all stand at the mouth of the driveway waiting to pile into cars and make our way to Stoughton like we have so many times before. We all know that this time when we get there, something will be missing, but we know we need to be with them as soon as we can. The ride goes by quickly but it still seems as though we have been in the car forever as we park and begin to spill out of it, making our way to the house. I walk into the kitchen behind my sister, everyone is there, I watch as my sister walks over to Joanne's son and hugs him. I watch as he latches onto her, bawling,

sobbing. They embrace for a long time and for the first time today I am seeing. He is only eleven and as I look at him I can't help but think of what last night must have been like for him. I wonder if he saw it coming like she did and suddenly I feel like I want to vomit again. As they let go I go to take my sisters place. I hug him tight, but I don't say anything, I know that this is all I can give him and I know that nothing I can do will be enough to make this better for him. I know I'll still try anything to make him smile for even just a moment.

For weeks it has been the same. I feel a hollow space in my chest and it only gets harder to breath, but nothing seems to make the feeling go away. I read articles, *Pregnant Stoughton Women Struck and Killed*. I watch the news as they call Joanne a hero, as they explain how in her final moment she warned her son to run. I listen as the drivers lawyer explains how she only had one glass of wine and some prozac and I remember how her story has already changed from this morning. I listen as everyone explains how the car came across the street and onto the sidewalk, how the baby died instantly, how the car came to rest on the tree Joanne's eleven year old had hidden behind. I can't make sense of it no matter how many times it plays through my head. I think about Christmas this year, about how for years I have been present more times than my uncle has been in his own home and so has she. I don't know how it could be Christmas without her. I don't know how 14 Grove Street could still feel like home without her. I can't imagine it. I feel like I've lost something I can never get back.