The End

A swing sits outside a bright pink house. The tan fibers of its flowery cushions hold the ghostly sensations of small fingers rubbing at the stitching while trying to maintain balance. This swing has been empty for years. Grandchildren and great grandchildren no longer look to its comfort during a visit with their grandmother on a warm day. The once black poles that hold it together are covered with rust that eats away at the paint. Mold and water stains cover the cushions from years of being rained on.

Inside the home sits Mozelle at her dining room table having her afternoon tea. The home is so silent that the sounds from outside spill in. She stares through the window right above her stove that faces an always busy highway and watches as the cars streak past, gradually magnifying and then becoming blurs. The sun beams in on her from the left side through the front door which she always keeps open during the day so that she can keep an eye out for any visitors, although they are very scarce. Her slick, curly black hair is illuminated by the light, so that one can almost see its brown tint. It’s midsummer and at least 80 degrees but she doesn’t mind. The warmth reminds her that she is alive although her old, delicate body doesn’t always feel that way. She inhales deeply and breathes in the smell of mothballs, a comforting scent for her. The smell of home.

Mozelle’s nervous hands clutch the handle of her mug. A few months back, she had fell getting out of the shower and hurt her wrist, and her hands have been shaky ever since. More and more, her body reminds her of the pressure that age applies to it. Everyday tasks such as walking prove challenging as they produce an ache or tire her out. Although she once loved to cook, the stove that is across from her is barely put into use. Instead, she makes a hobby out of dusting off the red, blue, and green rooster burner covers that are hardly ever moved.
She slowly lifts her cup to her mouth and, feeling the warm steam invade her lips, purses them to blow away the heat. With age comes routine and afternoon tea has become apart of hers, regardless of the weather. Tea is simple enough to make and doesn’t require her to exert too much of herself. It also reminds her of the days when her children were young and she longed for the peace and quiet that she has now. She would send her three boys outside and unwind to a cup of tea and, when their father would get home, she’d have another because he’d keep them occupied for a while.

About halfway through her tea Mozelle’s body signals to her that it’s ready for the next part of her routine with a heavy yawn. She empties out her mug into the sink, closes her blinds, and shuts the front door so that if anyone does stop by, they will assume that she isn’t home and leave her be. She puts her silk bonnett over her head, and lies down in bed. Stretching out is always a little troublesome. Bones in her legs and arms tend to crack and it is in those first moments of laying that she feels the aches and pains, but once she finds a comfortable position, dozing off to sleep doesn’t take her long.

While asleep, Mozelle begins to feel a hand brushing lightly up and down her cheek. There is someone mumbling and as she wakes, she recognizes the unintelligible sound as prayer. Bewildered, she looks through blurred, sleepy eyes to see figures in all black surrounding her bedside. There is a woman at the foot of her bed caressing her legs, wailing. Every now and then she lifts her head and through the black veil, Mozelle sees that it is her eldest granddaughter. Mozelle attempts to lift herself up but the light hand becomes forceful and pushes her forehead down and the prayer intensifies. She realizes that the hand belongs to her preacher, Bishop Mack.

“Lord!” He shouts. “We know that we loved Ms. Mozelle, but you loved her best. So sleep on sweet lady, sleep! Get your rest.”
Her granddaughter raises her arms from her legs and stretches out towards the ceiling. Her deep red lipstick catches Mozelle’s attention.

“Amen!” She shouts.

A series of Amen’s and Hallelujahs echo through the crowded room.

While subdued under Bishop Mack’s sweaty hand, Mozelle tries her best to piece together what is going on. Behind her granddaughter is a crowd of sniffling mourners that consists of her other grandchildren, a few great grands, nieces and nephews, and a few cousins. To the other side of her bed are her two living sons, Phonsa and Bobby. Bobby, who has always been expressive, is sobbing into his hands like a child. Phonsa, the more withdrawn and oldest of the two stares down at her solemnly, a deep crease that almost seems permanent indents his dark forehead and his eyes are scarlet red, a sight to see against his umber brown skin. She turns to him and whispers.

“Phonsa. What’s goin’ on?”

“Shh, Bishop Mack ain’t done preachin your eulogy,” he responds somberly.

“My eulogy?”

She lifts her leg to make sure its movable. She opens her mouth and inhales deeply sucking in mothball flavored air. She exhales with a loud sigh.

“Momma stop making a scene,” Phonsa snaps curtly.

“It’s ok Ma, it’s almost over,” Bobby says reassuringly even though Mozelle is not reassured at all.

“It’s not ok! Don’t you see me breathing boy?”

“Shhh.” Phonsa exerts even harder.

Bishop Mack’s voice rings throughout the room.
“God needed another rose for his mighty garden. What better flower than our Mozelle?”

He proclaims.

One of the young children runs out of the room holding himself. Mozelle can never remember his name but she knows that he’s her great grand with a reputation for wetting himself.

She suddenly yells out, “Don’t let that baby pee all over my carpet!”

Bishop Mack coughs into his hand apprehensively as if he is annoyed about being interrupted. Everyone else carries on as they had been, everyone except Phonsa who grabs his mother out of her bed and leads her out of the room, holding a finger up to signal to the preacher and the crowd that he doesn’t mean to disturb them.

“Listen. I know that dyin must be hard for you but it’s hard on us too. Just please lay down quietly and let the Bishop finish his sermon.”

He then leans forward and embraces his mother warmly.

“I know I ain’t always been the best son. But I love you Mama.”

“I aint goin back in that bed until somebody tells me what’s goin on!”

Hearing Mozelle fuss, Bobby steps out of the room, eyes still watering. He gently grabs his mother’s hand.

“Ma, I’m so sad you have to go but it’s your time.” As he says this, he tugs on her arm ever so softly, attempting to direct her back into the room.

“Get your hands off me Bobby, I’m aint going nowhere. Now get these people out of my house!”

Realizing that their mother is not going to yield, Phonsa and Bobby grab her and attempt to drag her back into the bed as the Bishop attempts to lay hands on her again and the wails and
screams from the others grow louder. After wearing herself out from struggling she finally
decides to give in.

“I’ll get back in bed...but I need a moment to myself.”

“Everyone.” Says the Bishop. “Let’s give sister Mozelle some time to gather herself.”

“Amen.” They all respond.

They watch as she walks out, no longer trying to stop her, but continue to cry at her
bedside. The Bishop prays.

“Lord we ask that you help Miss Mozelle come to terms with her condition for death is
only temporary. With you there is everlastin’ life!”

“Thank you Jesus!” A voice shouts from the room.

With respite Mozelle walks through her house and looks at the images framed all over
her home. Faces she has held onto, has loved. Every photo she’s received of a grandchild or great
grand hangs on a wall, or sits on a table. Her house is a bit cluttered with all of the photos but
she’s never minded. Those same faces stood, or sat, or kneeled in her bedroom declaring that
she was dead and this filled her with so much vexation that her own eyes began to water. She
stops at a picture of her husband. His stout face stares back at her in disdain through glass
lenses so thick that the lines in his iris are visible. He always told her that she was a difficult
woman and she hates giving him the satisfaction of being right, even though he, himself is dead,
she just could not accept that she, who was breathing, moving, walking, and talking is not living.

Mozelle steps outside barefoot and presses her feet against the warm grass. She breathes
in the summer air as deeply as she can and confirms to herself that she is in fact, alive. Not
knowing what to do with this conclusion, she sits on the rusty old swing and listens to its
creaking as she rocks back and forth. Nobody else seems to notice the sound. They just continue
to file into her home like soldiers marching on a mission, some wailing, some with somber faces, and some with a look of indifference. Apparently her death has been the talk of the town and in so little time, her home was filled with not only family and friends, but strangers as well, which she hates. She notices that as people leave, they walk across the bright green lawn to the home of her sister, Sis Pat. They do not enter her home. Instead they pause for a brief moment, whisper “it’s such a shame’s” and “mmm mmm mmm’s” and leave crying even harder or shaking their heads in disbelief. This puzzles Mozelle even more because normally, when there’s such a commotion at her home, Sis Pat would be sitting on the porch, eager for visitors to stop and tell her what is going on.

Mozelle has not spoken to Sis Pat for months, a normal condition between the two. They often go through sabbaticals from one another because one is always offended by something the other says and being the old mulish women that they are, neither ever wants to be the first to give in. Under the circumstance, Mozelle decides to be the bigger person.

She musters up the strength and walks across the large lawn with the fervor of someone 20 years younger. By the time she makes it to Sis Pat’s back door, she needs a moment to catch her breath and bends over for a few seconds. She knocks on the screen door and she can hear the rattling echo throughout the house.

“Sis Pat! Are ya home?”

Sis Pat’s daughter, Amerie opens the door. Mozelle hasn’t seen Amerie in years so this catches her by surprise. She had moved up North for college and never came back except on holidays which are normally the times when Sis Pat and Mozelle are most at odds. Needless to say, to remain out of the crossfire between the two sisters, Amerie opted to stay away. But here she is now looking down at Mozelle with grievous eyes.
“Aunt Mozelle, God rest your soul. I was waiting until the commotion dies down to come see you.”

Amerie grabs ahold of her and squeezes her tight. Mozelle looks through her arms to see Sis Pat sitting on her favorite couch that still had the plastic on it from 30 years ago when she bought it.

She pushes past Amerie who says behind her, “You should get back. The preacher can’t conclude your service without you.”

“Pat,” Mozelle calls out ignoring Amerie.

“Mozelle what you doing here?”

“You didn’t hear? Apparently I’m dead.”

“Oh, yeah.”

Mozelle looks around and sees that aside from Sis Pat’s couch, everything is different. Her rose wallpaper that she loved so much has been torn down and replaced with an eggshell white, her wooden dining table has been replaced with a marble table with black leather seats, and boxes are spread all over the house indicating more change to come.

“What’s going on here?” She asks.

“I died a month ago.”

“You died?”

“That’s what they say. One night I was just layin’ in my bed and here come Bishop Mack with all that hollerin’. Then all my children and the family, the ones that I was still speaking to at the time all came and put on a funeral for me. Afterwards, for a day or two, everything was quiet and I thought to myself, I’m still breathin’ so maybe I’m not dead. But then here come Amerie talking about this is her house now since I’m dead and all. She don’t bother me much though, she mostly acts like I’m not here so I figure this aint so bad, it’s much of the same.”
Mozelle grabs her sister’s hand and squeezes it tight.

“Pat, you feel that don’t you?”

“I suppose.”

“So there’s still life in us.”

“I suppose.”

“Well then how can we be dead?”

“I figure at some point God will feel sorry for us and invite us into the pearly gates.”

“He don’t invite livin people into heaven.”

“I suppose.”

Realizing that Sis Pat is just as deluded as everyone else, Mozelle lets out a sigh of defeat. She leaves her sister’s home and trudges across the grass defeated. The line of people watch her walk back into the home and some nod with a “God rest your soul” or “Rest in peace Miss Mozelle, we’ll miss you dearly.” Others burst into sobs at the sight of her. She stops in front of her bright pink house and the thought of it no longer being hers fills her with grief. She still can’t accept that she is dead but she also can’t deny that everyone else is treating her like she is.

She enters her home and is greeted by Bishop Mack.

“Sister Mozelle, your family is ready to give you tribute.”

He locks his arm in hers and leads her into her room. She gives no resistance. There are people all over the home. Some sitting at the dining room table sobbing into a plate of food, some in the den watching tv with the volume down low so as not to disturb the service, and some leaning against the walls tired from standing and waiting on Mozelle’s stubbornness to come around. She wonders where the food came from and why people are already eating even though technically her funeral hasn’t concluded. Had she not been so exhausted, she would be infuriated by the sheer disrespect.
Phonsa and Bobby assist her in getting back into the bed, lifting her legs of which she felt the pressure from her walk to Sis Pat’s. She relaxes and allows the service to continue.

“We’re going to have a few words from Ms. Mozelle’s youngest son, Bobby.” Bishop Mack announces.

Mozelle watches the debacle that goes on before her but doesn’t really hear much of what is said. Bobby can barely get through his speech through his uncontrollable sobbing. Her granddaughter with the red lipstick fumbles through a poem that she wrote in remembrance of her. One of the children sings and fills the room with a few *auwus* before the sniffling and crying continues. It’s all absurd to Mozelle who, annoyed waits for it all to be over while Sis Pat’s words ring in her head. *This ain’t so bad.* She decides to wait for the commotion to be over and the quiet that Pat talked about to return in hopes that as Pat said, God would invite them in since they are no longer welcome in their world.

By nightfall, most of the people are gone. Mozelle’s sons shuffle around the kitchen cleaning leftover plates and trash and Bishop Mack kneels next to Mozelle.

“Sister. I pray your soul rests in the Lord for he gives us perfect peace. Amen.”

He raises up, kisses her on the forehead, and leaves.

Mozelle is relieved that it’s finally over because lying in bed for so long has caused her to stiffen. She’s unsure if she should get up or just wait for her sons to leave so as not to cause trouble. After a few moments of trying to withstand her stiff bones, she decides that she no longer cares what her sons have to say. Slowly she inches her way out of the bed and to the kitchen.

Bobby, who is washing the dishes turns to her and says “get your rest Ma. Heaven lasts always.”
She ignores him and walks through her front door. Once again, she sits in the old swing remembering those days when it seemed every weekend a member of her family came to visit and they would sit out and enjoy each other. She remembers first introductions to small baby grandchildren and great grandchildren that would happen on the swing. How those babies would be passed to her and she would rock them gently and welcome them into the world.

She looks up to the sky at the shimmering stars and hopes that through them, God will send a message. To herself she hums

*Pass me not*

*O gentle savior*

The hairs on her arms raise and anxiety rings through her like a bell being struck.

*Hear my humble cry*

*While on others thou art calling*

Her voice quivers as she lets out the last line.

*Do not pass me by*

Mozelle shifts her attention to the old pink house and wonders if she should even reenter.