

Draft of “Ceremonials”  
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While Away

When she was twenty, Grandma Pink Harrison flung a mattress out of a cottage window while pregnant with our mother. The mattress was on fire. The rest of the cottage was not.

Grandma owned a small resort on the Chain O’ Lakes. She called it *While Away* and proudly kept each cottage on the resort grounds spotless.

On a morning round, she checked one of the cottages and saw the mattress aflame. A cigarette, she guessed. Rather than lose the cottage, she hoisted it on her shoulders and shoved it through the window.

The mattress became a bonfire. The grass never grew back where it burned.

Grandma liked to tell us this story over and over again, as if she were some sort of myth, hoisting a great evil. She whispered that my sister and I should be so lucky to be sparks.

*You were twin stars in my eyes even before your mother was born.*

We had giggled, feeling our first dose: The scorch of such love.

Grandma died unexpectedly, planning for retirement. Her heart was on fire.

Our mother inherited the old resort. She left home on a windy night and returned soaked in gasoline and smoke. Our mother called it a cleansing.

The cottages burned. Every single one.

The next morning, she drove us to the property. The police had arrived on account of the unauthorized burn. We remember red lights. Piles of naked ground. Scalded. As if Grandma’s specter hurled ever mattress into the squall.