

Mark Heinlein
Markham Finalist

dear pops i'm trying

my old man's getting his top teeth pulled next week. i don't like this. he'll ask me to drive him to dr. fitzgerald's office and i will. and he'll talk about ornamental cherries (even if they're not in bloom) how they remind him when his grandparents took him to d.c., *you should have seen the whole town aburst with blossom*. always when we're on this side of town, he tells me how he picked apricots at white's orchards when he was ten.

i sit in the living room and listen to the details of the procedure, how he could have opted for implanted posts for his collapsed bridges. i listen. i watch his hands never fidget, like books with split spines fallen from a nightstand.

he tells me the trouble fitting dentures, how he's anxious the anesthesia will affect him, how a man his age might not wake up, how his gums will be swollen and the goddamn things might not even fit after that. i listen, as light shoves through the window over his shoulders, over his terrycloth housecoat. the light makes him small, and i see he knows it makes him small, he remains stiffly turned to it. but for a moment, there is a quiet we know we shouldn't disturb. of course, nothing lasts. outside, clouds move, sun shifts. he stands up, asks if i'd like a cup of coffee.