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All this happened, more or less

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Author Bio

Noelle Muni is a junior with an English major with writing concentration and an art history at Gettysburg College. In addition to writing for and working on The Mercury, she writes for The Gettysburgian, works at the Schmucker Art Gallery, and enjoys engaging with art and literature across genres and time periods. Her favorite color is pink.

All this happened, more or less

NOELLE G. MUNI

Aunt Judy's house never changed.
It was built by her father, years and years ago. The wooden paneling is all original, the swordfish on the wall was his biggest catch. Aunt Judy's house was teeny-tiny, just those two rooms, two bedrooms, and a bathroom that didn't have a shower (you had to go outside for that). The only big thing in Aunt Judy's house was the swordfish. It was huge, and blue, and supposedly stuffed, but it didn't look very soft to me.

I tapped it once when everyone else was asleep. I climbed up onto the couch, reaching my little fingers and rapped against its shell. Knock, knock, knock. Sounded empty. Not stuffed, just as I suspected. Things got complicated after that, though. I knew the swordfish at Aunt Judy's house wasn't filled with stuffing, but maybe there was something else in there. He was big enough that something could surely live inside of him. Maybe he's a Russian nesting fish and there are an infinite amount of smaller and smaller swordfish inside. Oh! Or maybe the tiny men who live in the tiny lighthouses on the shelves meet inside the swordfish for parties or Christmas. Or Hanukkah. I don't know what the tiny lighthouse men celebrate. They could celebrate anything.

All these years later, I wonder if maybe the swordfish has Uncle Larry's ghost in it. On second thought probably not. Afterall, Uncle Larry liked to watch the Phillies on TV, and the swordfish is facing the wrong way to watch TV. The street outside of Aunt Judy's window isn't very exciting to watch and I don't think Uncle Larry would like

being cramped inside a fish for very long.
Though I suppose ghosts could also be very, very small.
I don't think Uncle Larry's ghost would like being in there
even if he were small.
I haven't seen any wires going inside to hook up a tiny TV.

Five years before he fully died, Uncle Larry died on the
operating table, a clot in the pulsing tubes that
fed blood to his brain meant they failed to get the oxygen
to his brain and he died there. Aunt Judy was upset because
the doctors and nurses didn't bother to check his DNR,
which is a piece of paper that says if you're dead you want to
stay dead. Whirring, whirring, whirring,
then the snap, the crack of a rubber band,
the release of the pent up electrical surge.
And he was alive again. Or at least half of him was.
Not the half of him that could laugh
Or speak
Or move
Or drink water
Or eat food.

Just the part that could watch TV. Uncle Larry, though he had
to have his food blended and couldn't drink gin, would wear
his Eagles hat and sit under his Phillies blanket and watch
the game. Then, five years after that, that part of him died too.

Uncle Larry watched the TV all the time, so when we would
visit, we'd be stuck watching whatever Uncle Larry was watching.
This was the game, if a game was on, or it was Hallmark movies.
He really liked Hallmark movies, even though they're all the same.
Sometimes, if we were lucky, he'd find an old movie on TV that he
deemed worth watching. One time it was *Jaws*. I wondered while
watching it if this movie was the reason that Uncle Larry never walked
down the block to the beach with us. But then I remembered that
Uncle Larry would sometimes walk to the bay with us, so then
I wasn't so sure. One time it was *The Birds*. I was horrified
by that movie. But I felt better when Uncle Larry explained to me that
real birds don't act like *The Birds*, and that I didn't have to be scared
of made-up birds. He was good at grounding people, deflating
the balloon in their mind that filled up with worries.

One time I was walking back from the bay and refused to wear shoes. I stepped on a tiny cactus. The soft ball of my foot was filled with lots and lots of teeny-tiny needles. You could hardly see them. I hobbled into Aunt Judy's house, weepy-eyed and snotty-nosed. This was in the time before either half of Uncle Larry died, and he sat me on his TV watching chair. With tweezers, he carefully picked out all of the needles one at a time. Even the made-up needles that were only hurting me because I believed they could. I was always someone who was scared of made-up birds.

But Uncle Larry is dead now. And I know his ghost isn't living in the un-stuffed dead body of a very old swordfish. But I'm not going to check. If he is in there having a non-religious winter celebration with the lighthouse guys, I wouldn't want to interrupt. It's easier to think he's in there, too. Sometimes made up things aren't scary. Sometimes they help us through things that are.