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Dawn was breaking as she greeted her brother at the airport, and they drove across the waking city, she navigating from the street guide in her lap as her brother negotiated the unfamiliar gear-shift. The funeral was in a small town about an hour and a half north east of Melbourne. They had visited their father's cousin frequently enough as children: she and her siblings made friends with his kids and they had ridden horses with them and roamed in the bush near their house.

It had been some time since they had made the journey as adults and the roads had changed. The landscape hadn't though. As they drew nearer, she suddenly saw afresh the bulk of those beautiful mountains, and remembered how they rose up into the clouds, and how the valleys in the slopes of the mountains would be full of the song of bellbirds in the summer. On a grey winter's day like this, however, they were filled with a roiling mist.

The church was filling rapidly. It was full of faces that they recognised as variants of their own: the same high foreheads, fleshy noses and hooded eyes. In their usual clannish way, they were able to identify and put names to most of the faces, although the grandchildren were harder to identify. They had all grown, and at least four more had been born since the family last gathered. The little kids roamed the aisles, chatting to people they recognised, and occasionally going to look at the coffin where their grandfather lay, covered in native brush from the property where he had lived for fifty years. Commercial bouquets were out of place here.

The coffin had been made for the cousin by his eldest son. The wife of their cousin sat calmly in her wheelchair, so close to the coffin that she could reach out and touch it. Her beautiful face wore its usual air of calm. What must have been passing through her mind—the memories of over fifty years of companionship and family life—remained entirely her own secret, to be fully emotionally experienced, but not shared: not here, in this big public moment.

The Requiem Mass was long and rambunctious. That was the only word for it, she thought, as unlikely as it seemed. The priest, an old friend of their cousin, was late, held up in the traffic, and they had to start without him. He blew down the aisle ten minutes into the ceremony, fully robed and apologising profusely. He interrupted the ceremony frequently to remind them of the point of some crucial part of the ritual, and to remind them of how it was the love of family and community that was important, not the church's nitpicking obsession with sin.

Each of their cousin's eight children remembered him in all of his generous, articulate, devout and eccentric complexity. He was a good man, his youngest son said. The son had flown to see him earlier in the year, all the

way from Germany. As they parted for the last time, he told them, his father's last words to him were 'say your prayers and go with God.' At the end of the service, the eight children came forward, and shouldering the burden of their dead father, bore him slowly down the aisle to the sound of Irish pipes. The eldest daughter's Nissan Patrol had been backed into the porch at the doorway of the Church, its back doors standing open, waiting to receive the coffin.

At the cemetery, the rain began to fall in a soft mizzle. It reminded her of the rains in Ireland, and she thought how appropriate that was. She had not attended what she called a 'hole in the ground' funeral since they had buried her father, and she had forgotten how deep the hole was, and the mound of dirt, covered with astro-turf. She remembered how, on the way back from the cemetery after her father's funeral, this same cousin had told her that he hated the way the funeral industry controlled every aspect of burial, and that he hoped that when the time came, his kids would put him on the compost heap and let him return to the earth.

As the service proceeded, she tried to keep her mind off the hole, breathing deeply to overcome the rising tide of claustrophobic panic she felt whenever she thought about the weight of soil on top of the coffin. At the moment when the coffin was lowered into the earth, the grandchildren crowded forward, their faces alight with the kind of open curiosity with which small children address the imponderables of human life. The priest addressed the congregation, telling them that their cousin had requested that he be literally buried by his loved ones, and for this purpose, a number of shovels had been provided. A nervous laugh rippled through the crowd, but when the sons picked up the shovels, and in the business-like way of men accustomed to the task began to shovel the earth onto the coffin, others came forward and began to shovel, too. Some simply took up clods of earth and threw them in.

She stood back, and watched her brother take up the shovel. She wanted to look down into the hole, but she was afraid of the finality of the sight. As she watched, the grandchildren came forward and crowded around the hole. Some of them used their hands, others had little scoops and plastic cups which they used to throw the dirt down, watching with interest as it rained slowly down on the pine box below. Their absorbed and interested faces calmed her, and she stepped forward to look. The box was almost covered with dirt by then, and she saw with relief and wonder that it was strangely comforting, as though the dirt were a blanket, and they were gently putting him to bed.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Anne Brennan.*