

Undertow

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I. MAUSOLEUM

Aiden braces himself against the branches of a tree as he walks down the embankment. The ground is covered with leaves and melting frost, the after effects of a cold November night. He balances himself against the incline, his feet sliding out with the leaves, trying to keep from dropping the twelve pack of Genny Cream Ale he's brought with him. Looking through the dim dawn light, he sees the mouth of the cave, sees the bodies of dead fish, their carcasses frozen and thawing with the rising sun. When he reaches the cave, he kicks one of the bodies, watches it roll over from one side to the other, its eyes eaten out by birds or decay. He nudges it with his foot towards the water; its body as it once was, returning to the river.

He moves forward walking in zigzags to avoid the hordes of fish stretching from the shoreline to the back of the cave. The fish seem fresher, less eaten away at by the sun and scavengers, as he moves toward the back, as he switches on his flashlight and escapes the sound of the waterfall and the river.

When Aiden reaches the pitch dark, when all he can see is a small trace of the morning, he finds the entrance, a hole in the rock structure, a door so small he has to get down on his hands and knees sliding fish out of his way so he can crawl through it. He's got a good pile of fish, five or ten on each side of the door now, and looks closely at their silvery bellies swollen with eggs or their last meal or their last breath, he thinks. The cave and his stack of fish remind Aiden of a mausoleum, of some sort of mass fish grave, makes him think about family and all that comes with that.

Aiden's older brother killed himself this summer jumping off the walking bridge in Seneca Park. All his friends are pretty sure it was a suicide but the paper doesn't say anything except for the obit, which is short and has Aiden's name in it as someone who Pony is survived by. What Aiden wants is to see how it played out, like a movie or like one of those short films at the peep booths they used to go to. Did his brother jump headfirst or cannonball style

the way he did when they'd go swimming? Is it possible while climbing on the steel underbelly of the bridge that he simply fell? Was Pony alive when he hit the water or dead? And if he wasn't dead, what was under there in the dark, in that current that carries things like a freeway traveled by wrappers and animals and lost things?

Aiden carries the obit folded in his wallet. He unfolds it, the ink smeared and the creases wearing through, and searches for some answers in the official air of it, in its attention to facts and dates. He has run his thumb over his own name so many times that it is erased from the text.

When he found out, he walked down to the bridge where he knew Pony had jumped, crawled out under it and collected the few trinkets they had left there. He sat over one of the 2' by 2' openings and dropped the trinkets down one at a time, their Bert and Ernie figurine, which their mutual crush had given them. And other things: empty bottles, one for each beer they'd tried, and the KFC regalia they'd stolen from Pony's job, baseball caps and polo shirts and boxes of honey mustard and barbecue sauce, which they'd eaten in handfuls when they were high or just on dares. Aiden watched all of it vanish below the surface of the water, leaving behind tiny splashes like a leaky ceiling into a bucket before being swept under, before disappearing.

Aiden's stepfather tried to talk to him after Pony's death, tried to tell him that suicide was an imbalance in someone that no other person could erase. Like a mistake. Something nature didn't intend. It didn't help and Aiden had nothing to say.

Aiden got Pony's car, a rusted out red Ford Tempo, from the KFC parking lot—they were going to impound it, but his mother went down and told them they weren't touching her son's car without hearing from her lawyer and they let her have it because they were city cops and city cops always have other things to worry about. Aiden imagines it, a parking lot full of abandoned cars, homeless people like his brother sleeping in them, little Hoover Ville's on wheels, he thinks and smiles.

Pony's car is parked, dead in their stepfather's backyard.

The stepfather who insisted their mother throw Pony out because of the drugs and the stealing and all the other crimes he'd committed. The car is out behind the garage where his mother can't see it from the kitchen. Their stepfather says it is a constant reminder of her dead son and she shouldn't be looking at it. Aiden spends hours in it. He drinks out there and runs the battery listening to the oldies station, which was Pony's favorite, bands like The Four Tops and The Temptations, the things they'd seen their parents dance to, the music they remember as background for family pictures and holidays before their real dad's death and the subsequent stepfather. One day their mother came out and sat down next to Aiden, listened for a while to the music her oldest son, the runt among his friends and so called Pony, listened to, and she asked Aiden to dance. It had only been a few days after they'd buried Pony. Aiden and his mother looked like a Polaroid picture, frozen in a field in front of a broken down Ford Tempo, like a postcard never mailed and never read.

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When officer Tantillo came to their house, Aiden was the only one home. He knew when he saw Tantillo that it wasn't good news because he was the narcotics officer that ran the D.A.R.E program at their school and he'd been involved in a few of Pony's prior arrests. Tantillo asked Aiden if he wanted to go to the station to identify the body or wait for his parents. He decided he'd wanted to go without them. When they got to the morgue, it was nothing like Aiden had expected, all bright and warm and sort of lived in. There were fast food wrappers on one of the counters and someone's shoes, perhaps removed for comfort, lying on the floor. A pretty girl sat at a desk with a list of names or numbers, too pretty, Aiden thought, to be in a place like this with her deep red lipstick and freckled skin.

Aiden, once officer Tantillo had left him with the girl who would take him to the body, couldn't bring himself to go in. He was afraid of her, of how much he fell in love with her upon seeing her and didn't want to hate her when she brought him to the body of his older brother. He wasn't certain of Pony's death, though Tantillo would know as well as him or his parents what Pony looked like, and he didn't want certainty, especially not in front of that girl. He walked home, stopping by the KFC to see if Pony was there, parked in his car, listening to oldies or maybe even taking out the trash or having a smoke break. Aiden went home and sat behind the shed where his brother's car would be parked in

a few days, waiting for his parents to come home, to go to the police station themselves, to return with news.

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Aiden looks at the fish lying all around the little side cave he's crawled into, looks up at the bags nailed into the wall full of their things: found toys, bottles, squirt guns. Normally Pony would be here with him once the water had drained out for the winter and they'd clean out the room, take the bags down and set up their things, creating, for the cold months, a hideout. Inside they'd lay rocks from the river for a fire pit, would put lamps with candleholders in them around the room. He turns his attention to the fish, stands around them, in the middle of them, unsure of what to do. He opens one of the beers from his twelve pack, sips it, carefully breaks the tab off for good luck, making sure not to bend it or damage the can. He kicks at the fish in front of him, their bodies slamming against the wall or sliding through the opening into the main cave, his beer splashing onto his hand, his mind telling them to swim before the water subsides and they're all left flopping on dry land, dried up, dead.

He slams his beer against the far wall and thinks of Officer Tantillo's advice when they were in D.A.R.E, about all the advice that people have for him now that his brother is dead.

Feeling suddenly dizzy, he sits down amongst the fish, knowing that he'll carry their scent for the rest of the day. He notices the flashlight—which rests on the floor—its beam reflecting off the shiny scales of the fish and scattering around the room. He looks right into the beam so intensely that the room and the fish and the bags of things disappear. He loses himself like this, looking at light bulbs or television screens. He thinks these “spells” (what the doctor called them) have to do with loss or absence or something his mother said after their father died so many years ago. But then another part of him thinks it is some sort of disorder or way of understanding the world, which he hasn't yet named or figured out.

Aiden remembers the night he and Pony both lost their virginity. They were in Pony's car, Pony up front and Aiden in the back. They'd gone on a double date with the Carter sisters and they were making out with them down behind the zoo. Rumor had it that if you could get one of them to do something, give you a hand job, go down on you, you could get the other to do the

same with your buddy. Pony had been dating the older one, Nikki, and he knew that if he got her to sleep with him for the first time while her sister was there with his brother, then they'd both have a chance. Aiden can see Pony from the back seat, even though the younger sister, Shannon, is on top of him, kissing at his neck. In the rearview he sees Nikki taking his brother's penis in her mouth, sees his brother's hands pushing up and down on her head. In the light coming down the hill from the zoo, he can't make out their features, knows nothing except that they are young and passionate and together. Aiden is no longer paying attention to his date, his eyes, as she unbuttons his pants, are glued to the light, the way it wraps around the branches and leaves of the trees overhead, watches as everything freezes and all four of them are naked and alive and almost lost in the dark.

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Aiden moves around the cave in a slow circle. Pony found this place three winters ago on a fishing expedition. He brought his friend Areacode and his little brother here to establish a fort. The three of them drank bottles of Genny Light in the dark, occasionally flipping on a lighter to find another bottle or to light a smoke. Then when their eighteen pack was gone, they smashed the bottles against the back wall of the larger cave, risking their flesh and the possibility of injury with every shattered bottle that resonated out into the dark. Aiden returned after the first snowfall alone with a six pack of expensive beer his step father had left in the fridge. He smashed the bottles in the smaller cave where the glass and the liquid sprayed up around him and left his arms covered in small cuts and his pants soaked through. When he turned on his flashlight, he could see one last fish flopping in the remaining water that hadn't evaporated yet, broken bits of bottle imbedded in its scales.

Alone again, Aiden remembers the sound of those bottles breaking, hears it filling the air around him. It's quiet at first and then grows louder, drowning out the sound of the waterfall and the river and the other sounds that occur in the silence of the cave. He remembers their first trip here, the way the water hadn't completely drained yet, the way his feet were cold and his heart raced as pools of fish flopped around them. He wishes he'd had a picture of it, them splashing around in the dark, excited with the promise of escape.

It's getting on toward noon now, and he looks

down at the floor, which is completely dry, and he is sure he must rebuild the cave, take down their things and gently carry the fish to the water. He picks up the first fish, begins the clean up by running his hands over its slimy scales, to remember the way it makes him feel being this close to death. He sits down in the pile again and begins sliding the fish with care towards the tiny opening into the larger cave.

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Aiden used to go to a couple different Catholic churches for Saturday Mass. He would sneak in five minutes late and sit in the last pew, being sure to slide slowly into his seat, and he would watch, not the Mass so much as the people, the regulars, who he'd come to know by sight and then the people who came once a month or once every few months. He liked to see how they reacted, whether they sang during the hymns or knew the prayers. He could tell who was faking by the way they moved their mouth or the way their head was positioned. He'd been a faker once, had mumbled the few words he'd known, and most of his prayers asked God to make sure no one knew he was faking, but he'd come to learn all the common ones, all the ones a once a month member or maybe even twice a month member might know. He remembers one time an older woman fell when she tried to move toward the kneeler and then the whole service stopped and women rushed to her. He remembers laughing and the whole congregation looking back at him, noticing—he imagined—his presence for the first time. In his mind everything was frozen but his laughter, which played on like a soundtrack despite the movie's end, the credits scrolled through. The sound of it echoes and everyone one is looking at him and he cannot stop.

He liked confirmation the most although he'd never taken part in it. He felt moved by, the order of it, the ceremony. Sometimes he'd sneak in before Mass and confess, telling the priest that he wanted to take part in the confirmation but had not been through communion and felt guilty about it. He confessed that he didn't understand that guilt because he had stolen and lied before but for some reason couldn't bring himself to do this one very simple and perhaps less offensive act. Aiden wanted the priest to tell him it was all right to come up for confirmation, but none of them ever did

and he always thought that unchristian.

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Before his brother's death, Aiden and Pony collected holiday lawn ornaments. Right before Christmas, in November and early December, when people are putting up decorations through the suburbs, they sneak out at night in fresh snow after blizzards and load them into Pony's Ford Tempo, the head of Santa Claus or the antlers of Rudolph hanging out the open back window. They have a place along the river where they can steal electric from one of Kodak's outlet buildings, and can plug the light up ones in, where they've created a holiday land of their own. There is an island carved into the cattails and swampy area around the river where all sorts of Santa Claus pieces and three nativity scenes and dozens of Frosty the Snow Man figures glow out at passing boats. They use their stepfather's rowboat, with its small outboard motor, as a way to complete their delivery. This thievery is something Aiden holds close to him, like their own way of celebrating the holidays or making them meaningful. He and Pony have a lighting ceremony every year where they bring all their friends out, five at a time in the boat on the 22nd of December, motoring the ten minutes to the island, and make the shore ignite like a gaudy neverland, like the cattails are on fire or, if the lights are blinking, like a bunch of flashbulbs firing out and into the night.

Aiden likes to paddle out into the middle of the river once the lighting has taken place and look in on his friends, on his brother and their creation. Sometimes he takes a girl with him, but mostly he goes alone every night for the two weeks they do it, and he sits there smoking a cigarette and gawking at the whole thing like a little kid believing in the possibility of reindeer and elves and the North Pole. He can barely make out the forms of the ornaments from the river, can't determine what his friends are saying, their screams and laughter blending together to form some kind of Christmas carol. This always makes him think of his father, of going to the Christmas service at St. Margaret Mary's, of the year they had two trees because his dad wanted the gaudy silver fake tree and their mother wanted a real one.

They sink each year's lawn ornaments after the holiday in a "sacrifice" to the river. Aiden can't wait, as they sink the old ones, for next Christmas and the ornaments they'll have then, can't wait to see what stuff stores will be peddling.

Aiden has, since his brother's death, tried to

imagine years of their holiday offerings bumping along the bottom of the river and being dragged out to the lake. He sees them catching in pockets, areas where the river eddies or on sand bars in the lake. He thinks of these places, the eddies and sandbars, the way he imagines his cave and the safety and comfort it brings him even without his brother. He imagines the river eating away at the plastic, chipping away first the paint, and then whole sections of the figures, pieces of them floating to the surface, polished white, the hint of things dead and disposed, the hint of things hidden in the river.

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But now Aiden crawls toward the small opening into the larger cave. He puts his hands against the collected mass of fish he's made, forming a barrier between him and outside cave. Aiden pushes hard, driving the collected bodies forward; as he stands now in the larger opening, he looks at his hands, dripping with water and slimy fish juice. He bends down after wiping his hands on his pants and picks up the first bunch. He moves toward the river with great care like a child holding cartons of eggs.

Mist from the waterfall sprays Aiden as he bends toward the river. He looks over at it, marvels at its power, endless and deadly. There are fishermen on the other shore, and Aiden watches as they cast and then pull their lines in and then cast again, creating perfect, unbroken arches. When the line and bait hit the water they are followed by a slight splash, which shoots randomly toward the air and lands again. Everything returns to the river.

II. THIS CLOSE TO THE POSSIBILITY OF DEATH

Aiden remembers being locked in a dark space, pressed in amongst old mothball smelling shirts and suit jackets in his father's closet. He is waving his arms around, trying to find the door, but it's dark and he can't orient himself amongst the clothes and the smell. Pony is outside the door giggling as he listens to the sound of the plastic that covers the clothing, listens to Aiden whimper and struggle.

"You're going to stop crying," Pony says.

Aiden slams himself into the door jarring it forward momentarily against the weight of his brother who is holding it shut on the other side. Pony bounces back for a second and then slams his shoulder into the door, pushing Aiden into the clothing and hangers.

"Dad's dead. And you're going to stop crying," Pony

says. “Men don’t cry.”

Aiden stops moving, sits on the floor, still hiccupping a little. “Fuck you.”

“Say you’ll stop crying and I’ll let you out.”

Aiden focuses on one of the shirts in front of him, letting his eyes adjust to the dark. This is the first time that the world goes on pause, where everything in the room, the plastic swaying as he breathes on it, the sound of Pony slumped against the door outside, tapping with his finger—they all stop and the only thing Aiden notices is that shirt and the dust that has started to collect on it. Aiden wants to yell at his brother, point out the dust collecting on their father’s clothing who really hasn’t been gone so long. He counts in his head. Fourteen days, he thinks, we are still so close to his death and their mother is still crying and Aiden just wants to be able to as well. But he also wants very desperately to get out of this closet, which he thought might smell like his father but doesn’t and won’t ever again.

III. SICK ROOM

Aiden thinks back to when he was fourteen and his father was dying. He sees himself walk into the pantry at his grandparents’ house and feels his mother’s arms around him, her warm tears pooling on his shoulder and soaking into his T-shirt. His eyes are frozen on the canned goods lining the walls, a can of Campbell’s Soup reading, “It Cures;” a whole world of sustenance incapable of healing anything, he thinks. He remembers the smell of laundry detergent and the sound of the washer drowning his mother’s sobs out. He remembers the light seeping in from the hallway and voices, his relatives, talking about football or the weather, everything but what they’re all thinking about—his father’s impending death—which is hanging over the house, oozing from the room he lies in, where he refuses meals and is too weak to get out of bed. It waits like a stranger at the door with his finger pressed to the peephole.

Aiden wants to talk to his father, wants to ask him questions about school and girls, which he is—sort of—starting to notice, wants his father to eat meals so they can do son stuff like play catch or camp. But his father cannot. When the family, aunts and uncles and grandparents, are all sitting in the dining room eating Thanksgiving dinner, looking in on his father’s bed, his father sits up with a tray of food in front of him. His mother—Aiden’s grandmother—sits with him trying to make him eat, though he refuses. Aiden

doesn’t say much, watches his father sip at some broth, drink a glass of water. His father quietly, at first, refuses anything else: bread, meat, even a second glass of water. His hands are weak, like the whole of him, but he squeezes his mother’s wrist when she pushes too hard, looks at her sternly, the way he might one of his sons, and says “leave it be.” From the dining room, the adults keep pushing him, his father telling him, “Eat, god damn it.” His wife, Aiden and Pony’s mother, pleading with him. Aiden and Pony exchange a look, each of them feeling a bit betrayed by their father, but even more sorry for him. How he is a child now. He won’t be able to keep the meal down. He knows that. And so do they. They’ve had talks with their father, the two of them, when everyone else is out, shopping for the upcoming holidays or at dinner. They know and he’s made it no secret that he will be dead soon. He can’t beat his cancer this time. His refusal to eat and their silence is a sort of final secret between them. An alliance in this acceptance of death and its coming.

Aiden imagines his grandfather sitting in the sick bed, wishes him there. For a second, Aiden sees his father sitting at the table with them, making jokes about Pilgrims and Indians and doting on his wife the way he does during the holidays. Aiden begins to doubt the validity of his memory, of any memory where his father is not sick, where he and Pony are not the sons of a dying man. He read in some book on faith or parenting his mother had lying around the house that children who have lost a parent early in life are forever in mourning. Staring in on his father, Aiden realizes for the first time that he is already in mourning, that this condition, this forever, has already taken hold of him. He thinks about the Christmas presents people have purchased for his father, the ones still waiting to be wrapped, or the few, mailed to his grandparents’ house early by his brothers and sisters, waiting to be unwrapped. His grandfather is still at work on his father, doing his best bad cop to bully him into eating something. The glass in Aiden’s hand slides out, hitting the table first and splashing up toward the ceiling; he looks over at Pony, trying to make him understand the reason for his eyes rolling back into his head, the way his body is slumping to the right, headed for the floor. All of it is slow motion. It’s all a fake. He just wants his father to be left alone.

IV. ANOTHER KIND OF CONFESSION

Aiden is walking with Pony in the woods behind the zoo. There are thinly worn trails from people walking their dogs

and kids exploring. Pony says he loves the woods, the way the trees grow without direction, the way they take over every inch with their roots and branches and leaves.

Aiden looks into the landscape ahead—the trees resemble a group of giants, their massive legs walking them towards the river. Aiden and Pony are headed there too, have come to get away from their mother and her new boyfriend, their eventual stepfather. It's only been six months since their father's death. And this is in the air between them.

"The only drawback to these woods is the smell of the river," Pony says. Aiden blows smoke rings into the air. "I wonder what makes it smell so fucking bad?"

"Good question," Aiden says, his long hair drawn back by the wind.

"They're probably pouring our shit and piss in it. Plus Kodak is probably still dumping all kinds of garbage into this thing. You can't even swim in this pond."

Aiden shakes his head.

"Besides, who'd want to swim in it? Look when we get down there." Pony points as they start walking down a set of stairs. "All that stuff just collecting on the shore. Can you see it?"

"Yup."

"It's like the river spits it all out, isn't it?"

"Never thought of it like that," Aiden says.

Aiden thinks about it, the water, the way it is their means of transportation and a site of happiness despite how ugly it is. It is a place for them to return to.

Pony points across the river. "See the crane sitting out on that fallen tree?"

Aiden focuses on the far bank. It's done nothing to hide; with its long noble neck hanging out over the water, it looks like a parent guarding the nest.

"I see a lot of those birds when I'm down here," Pony says.

"I wonder what they're doing just sitting there? Getting warm or something?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe waiting for one giant fish to come by so they'll be fed for months." Pony wants to stop talking about the river and the crane, wants the conversation to switch to the boyfriend. It's building, the need to say something, like water in a tub that is about to overflow, like rain in the street when the gutters are clogged. "What do you think of mom's new guy?"

There is the obvious response, but attached are other

questions about their father and that mourning which they both know will always be there. "He's a fucking clown."

"Agreed," Pony says, "a real chode." Pony launches a rock out into the water. There's more to talk about, he knows. He'll confess to Aiden that he doesn't miss their father. That he can't bring himself to or something like that. But for now, the brothers sit on the bank skipping rocks.

V. VISITING

Aiden is looking at the directory in front of the Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, searching for the spot. In his right hand he carries the first stolen ornament of the year, taken from the steps at St. Margaret Mary's. His feet kick at small piles of snow along the freshly paved road guiding him toward the ledge overlooking the Genesee and to the place where his father and brother are buried. He shakes the ornament with both hands, a snow globe probably left on the steps by a child after Sunday school, and watches the world inside blizzard, so engrossed in it that he forgets to pay attention to the path and falls forward into a snow bank, the ornament pitched forward and swallowed by the snow.

Aiden lies there, his face in his hands, elbows locked into the snow. His hair leaves brush marks in the powder as he shakes his head, laughing at himself and his lost ornament. Ahead he can see the weeping willow with its sagging branches almost laying its hands on Pony's headstone. It is the only tree near his father and his brother and he likes to think it protects them, watches them. Its seven years now since his father's death, only a few months since his brother's, and this early snow at the end of October is what has made him come. It will be the first time Aiden steals Christmas things on his own and the first time he fixes the cave, which he plans to do soon, in another few weeks when he is sure the water is gone and the fish are all dead. Aiden pulls himself up. He sits in the snow, his feet in the road, dusting off his jacket. He draws a cigarette from his pocket and the crushed pack, lights it, and gets to his feet. He takes a long look at the willow before continuing down the road. Aiden sits at his father's stone, leans against it, his head on the blank side, to the right, where space has been left for his mother's name. He pulls his lighter out again and flicks it on, lets the wind blow it out. Lights it again. He wonders if, despite her new husband, his mother will be buried here, if her name will ever fill this blank space and if it does, which name will she take.

Aiden looks over at Pony, notices the empty plot next to his. Their father, when they were young, bought these four spaces for the family. He was a practical man like that. It bothered their mother. This purchase seemed like a bad omen. And now Aiden thinks she was right. The willow brushes against Pony's headstone and Aiden wonders if the tree knows Pony is in there and alive, trying to save him. It's possible, Aiden thinks, that a mistake was made, that his brother, when pulled from the river, was very much alive and is now wrestling to be free. Don't cry, Aiden thinks and reaches his hand toward the branches. He is on his hands and knees now, in front of Pony's headstone, and he looks like that woman who fell at the Saturday mass. He giggles, his hands in front of him, in mock or maybe even real prayer.

He does not know what his mother will want. He knows he wants to be here.

Aiden, gently lifting himself into place, lies down in the outside plot. He tucks his arms in next to his sides, he snaps his legs together and tries to slow his breathing. He stares off into the top of the willow tree. The few snowflakes falling, the branches swaying in the breeze. And Aiden lies there, slowly covered by the snow.

VI. RETURNING TO THE RIVER

Sitting in his stepfather's rowboat with the motor idling, Aiden looks in on the Christmas lighting. He's done it a night early and alone so that he can have this to himself. It is a monstrosity, the type of thing families line up for, drive the long way home to see, pay ungodly amounts of money to walk through. He's dedicated himself this year, stealing two and sometimes three pieces a night. Without the car he carries pieces on his back, drags them along the snow-covered streets, uses an old wagon he's found in the shed as a means of transportation. He's stolen over sixty pieces. Light up ones and blow up ones. This year there are characters from every cartoon series imaginable. And there are older ones, ones from when he was a kid, Rudolph and Frosty and Jack Frost. These are his favorite though he also felt a ting of guilt when he took them. He has separated all of them into categories and spread them around the island and in the cattails according to this: "true" Christmas, religious, television. It looks like a park. Throughout it pieces stay lit and others flash and finally it glows out into the river and into the city like a gift.

Aiden remembers reading about the River Styx, about the way the gods respected it and swore an oath to it. His teacher said the gods who didn't obey the oath drank from the river and lost their voices for nine years, remembers her telling the class that the River Styx had the power to make someone immortal. Aiden removes his brother's obituary from his wallet, puts his hand into the water, and lets it go. Everything begins to freeze. Slow motion. The lights stop blinking and the river stops flowing and the motor's humming fades. Aiden decides, right before it all freezes and before he moves or blinks to unfreeze it, that he's going to keep the Christmas things this year. He is not going to sacrifice anything to the river. Aiden puts his hand on the motor, feels the heat against his bare hand. The lights are blinking again and a coast guard boat is coming up the river, the sound of it setting the world in motion. Aiden puts the motor in gear, slides the boat into the tiny channel where it will be hidden in the dark, and climbs into the cattails. He looks from the bank at the passing boat, the faces of the two men who are on it as they stare at his creation filled with a sort of awe and disbelief. As Aiden escapes into the bright lights.