



### Family Grave

My father wants to take me to see our empty family grave. I feel an immediate sadness in the implications of the place. He breaks the news that he wants his body to rest there., among the famous Polish writers and musicians and politicians. The grave was intended for my great-grandfather, but his body remains in London. As his only living heirs, we can use the space. I'm intrigued to find my family grave, which is also my own. Would I ever want my ashes brought back here? To rest in the soil that houses the ashes of all my relatives?

I follow my father into the cemetery's information center, a small concrete-lined room. I sit with my feet tucked up onto the chair, as my father waits in line. An elderly woman glares in my direction trying to show their disapproval of my feet up on the chair beneath me. I gaze back steadily, leaving my feet on the chair until my father returns surprised how quickly they are able to look up the details. Yes, the records are all correct. The grave is ours to use and he knows the general region. My father thinks he'll recognize it. He was there several times with his own father. I'm now excited to see it. I imagine my very own plot of earth, waiting to swallow me up.

We enter the quiet cemetery, shaded with enormous old trees not destroyed in the wars. The graves are meticulously maintained, funded by budgets from organizations, not individual families. One of my deepest loves is for old cemeteries, their secrets, their sadness, but mostly their sense of peace. Regardless of the life one lives, it ends in this silence, broken only with echoing distant footsteps and a crow calling out. We walk first along the tallest gravestones, and my father reads out the names of people, all familiar to him, none to me. I did not connect to American history, but I know nothing of my Polish history either. I can't list famous opera singers or writers, although I stand at their graves.



My father and I walk up and down the now narrower paths between graves. We come to one spot that he thinks is it. The plot is located between two kept graves, but it sits covered with weeds. We stand in front of it, letting the stillness hang around us. We both contemplate the silence beneath the earth, the next reality of no longer being able to hold our thoughts. I take out my camera. He stops me. “This can’t be it. I think there was a plaque.” He wants to keep looking.

I go up to a young couple tending a grave and ask if I can pet their young boxer puppy. I want my fingers to touch life. I want to feel the softness of its fur over the firm muscles, the warmth of its tongue. They smile at me oddly, trying to place my accent. I sit down on the stone pathway and roll around with the puppy. She presses her body into me, trusting me fully as only an unviolated puppy can do. I want to search out our grave, but I keep us here with the puppy. My father finally reaches down and runs his fingers into the short fur. He starts telling the couple about our past boxers, he, the man who doesn’t speak with strangers is sharing random stories. And in pausing our search, we both come back more fully into our bodies and ground within them instead of our future grave.

We walk several pathways up from the puppy, leaving her tied to a gravestone, happily rolling on the ground next to her owners. My father’s steps accelerate and I meander slowly behind. I breathe in the mix of earth and old vegetation. Somehow I feel like I can smell the age here. “This is it. It does have a sign.” I almost break into a run, not sure why I am now so eager to see our resting spot. I pause before it. “Arciszewski’s grave” is written in Polish on a small neat plaque. Such simple words, but they send a shiver through me. I imagine standing here with my father’s ashes or my Mama’s or both, and I can’t bear the heaviness of the image. I prefer to think of myself lying there in silence instead.