

Jonathan Everitt

## Death instructions

“A Georgian Revival,” he growls at me, radiating bourbon from three stools away. “Stone portico. Center hall with a winding staircase.” He’s mistaken me for a voice in his head but this is the first I’m hearing from him. I stare at him over the ridge of my glasses. “Pardon?” He flags the bartender and points at his empty drink, then turns back to me. “I want my funeral there. A mansion. And a Lincoln. Black. With leather and curtains. My final ride. In a tuxedo.” In the dim light, he looks a bit like Yoda, only bent in the wrong direction. He wants what he never had after he’s too dead to care. Me? I want my funeral at a shit hole of a place. Bare bulbs. Low ceilings. Rats, even. Haul my pine box there in a rusty pickup truck. No flowers. Because the nicest houses are always funeral parlors, and I refuse to play along. But I say nothing of this to my stranger. It’s his afterlife. I don’t have the heart to unsave him. “String quartet. That number they played on the Titanic just before—” he gestures with his glass, and it slips from his hand. His head comes to rest on the bar’s sticky oak. “Georgian Revival,” he mutters. And I whisper back, “It’s all a lie.”

## White American Foursquare

Somewhere less than here, a grumbling fountain pelts the roof of a classic cube tonight. Lit only by flashes, as if a dead deacon were still taking Polaroids from his perch. White aluminum skin. Old and sticky within. The people here got taller and more distant as you descended the staircases. This, the parsonage where he lived from ten to twelve. Happiest in the attic dormer, heavy wood eaves and cobwebs over a little window, flickering from the edges of a nor'easter. A dozen crates strewn from his tiny tower's center peak, to the vanishing edges where the roof sloped down to meet a house below. It was just about as far away as he could be from another child's shrine—on the other side of the driveway. This loft. This sanctuary. This secret.