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## In-Between

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**In-Between****Hazel Rhoads. Loving grandmother, mother, and wife.**

Daisies decorate me. They flower around me. They sprinkle more and more on top of me. The rain is forgotten, and the sun is a mere second away, but they are still here.

I am still here.

My family is still here.

The graveyard they chose is nice. It's decorated with the taste of spring and is littered with the tears of mourners. Relevant people or sporadic souls wander through here and cry for ones they do not know. My headstone blends with the others beside me. And describes me, Hazel Rhoads, in three basic words. Words I don't remember knowing. Next to me lies my great-grandfather. A man I hardly knew, but someone I know now. And my wife to my right. She beat me to greeting death by two years, but I see her again.

I am with her again.

Heaven and hell are nowhere in our sights. We hold hands above our graves and look over our children. Our son and daughter. Our accomplishments and our failures are composed into the melody of these two extraordinary human beings. They hold hands, their spouses at their sides, their children beside them. And they watch us.

They cannot see us.

They can't hear the joy in my tone as I reach for my loved ones. The ones I had only dreamed of seeing again if I had gotten into heaven. But here there is no euphoria. There is no utopia the pastors and preachers spoke about. And there is no dark despair in a pit. There is just the in-between. Where you are both happy and sad. Where there are both good days and bad days. My wife and I fight, but we also love. We still cry and mourn, but we know they are just around the bend.

My children are just around the bend.

They are walking away now. Heads held low, but hands held to their sides. The wisp of the winds blows the scent of daisies through the

air. My grandson, turns around, just for a glimpse. We wave, and laugh. And I swear he smiles, and waves back. I turn to my wife. My gorgeous wife.

My life was a matter of letters and numbers. My name condensed into a mere whisper of syllables put together. Counting down the days, speaking a prayer to anyone who would listen. Hoping for serenity. Asking for peace. 90 years old is a long time to live. It's a long time to force a breath every morning when you wake up. Every morning when you wake alone in an empty bed. Every evening when you go to sleep, wondering if you would wake up. But one day you don't wake up in an empty bed. You wake up in your first house. The house holds so many memories. I wake up with her next to me.

"Took ya long enough," she smirks. Reaching her hand out to me.

We are now holding hands above our graves, our old brick house appearing behind us. The porch is decked with a pitcher of iced tea, and two books for us to read. Nothing is said, but I know once we get to the porch we cannot go back. We cannot be close to our children, but instead must observe from a birds-eye view. She squeezes my hand.

"It's time, Hazel."

So we turn to leave. To go to our in-between.

**Claire Arneson** is a junior at the University of North Dakota. She is studying English and communications and hopes to work in the publishing industry in the future. She loves reading all of the books she can, and cheers the loudest at the hockey game.