

Ashes to Ashes

Jeremy, my brother, served a tray of drinks to the family members sprawled on the sofa and chairs in Mother's living room – we all needed a stiff one after the histrionics of Mother at Father's funeral service.

Aunt Ethel, Mother's younger sister, puffing her way through one unfiltered Marlboro after another, dipped a finger into a proffered shot glass and anointed herself behind the ears. "That's all for me, sweetheart," she said to Jeremy.

Jack Daniel's sloshed over glass rims as Jeremy nearly dropped the tray. Everyone knew Aunt Ethel loved her liquor as much as her cigs.

"Since when you on the wagon?" Uncle Frank said.

Aunt Ethel blew smoke rings in Uncle Frank's face. "Since I got a bun in the oven."

We all choked on our drinks. Uncle Frank had gotten fixed twenty years ago.

Aunt Ethel took another drag off her nicotine stick. "Too bad the daddy won't be around to witness the birth of the bundle of joy."

Aunt Ethel picked up the urn containing the remains of Father, popped its cork, and tapped her cigarette ash into it.

Things went downhill from there.