

We'll Be the Last Ones to Let You Down, by Rachel Hanel

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In Review



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By Rachel Hanel

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Growing up, Rachel Hanel knew about death. Her father was a gravedigger and cemetery caretaker, and she played among the tombstones. She noted the inscriptions on grave markers, especially the birth and death dates of those who

died young. But Hanel didn't know grief until her father died three days after it was discovered he had extensive cancer. He was just 46 and she only 15. Her father was gregarious, fun-loving, loquacious—the centripetal force in the family. With him gone, Hanel, her mother and two older siblings retreated into their own shells, grieving quietly and growing apart. Stoic Minnesotans, they never let their emotions show. Ultimately she found solace in words, “the words of gravestones, the words of oral stories, the ritual words of Mass.” Yet, sadly, there were no words for sharing grief with family members.