

*Grandma's dead, says Cousin Anne, and it's y'all's fault.*

Cousin Anne is pluckin a turkey and spittin out feathers.

*Y'all done killed Grandma, says Cousin Anne. Y'hear? Y'hear?*

Little John is five. That's all he is. He just five and a bit. He weren't no more than four and a half when they took him in the hospital but now he's five and he don't know nothin about no dead Grandma. He got a big iron cage on his arm and another big iron cage on his leg. His head hurts and his Mama cries all the time. Little John's Mama tells little John's Papa he ain't no damn good, right there in front of little John and that ain't no good thing for a little boy only wants to go chasin' rabbits, run with his dog except he can't run with no iron cage on his leg, maybe play with his slingshot except he can't pull no slingshot with no iron cage on his arm cos his elbow done broke over backwards with that motorbike wheel ridin' over him an' all.

Them folks on the street sure were shocked when they saw that little boy walkin' along with his arm all bent wrong an' everything, but then someone pick him up and next thing he know, there he is in hospital, he got all these grown-up men in them stripy pants and them all look down at him, and them all say, *You OK, little man?*

And then, someone say, *you in the wrong ward, little man.*

But he knows nothin'. He's only five.

Mama come and Papa come. They bring little cars. A little bus. A little fire engine. A digger with tracks and a bucket.

Mama cry. Papa don't do nothin'. Little John wants wee-wee. Nurse with moustache comes, takes little John to bathroom. Little John's scared. He wants to cry just like Mama, but nurse with moustache sticks fingernails in little John's leg. Hard.

*Shut up.*

Little John shuts up, says nothin' to Mama and Papa.

Big doctor comes. He gives out chocolate. Other little boy pukes up blood.

*Tonsils*, say somebody but little John hears *Nonsense*.

He's thinkin' *Nonsense make him puke blood?* But he don't say it.

*Big doctor's very rich*, says a boy. *A millionaire.*

*Millionaire*, little John thinks, but he don't say that neither.

Squares of chocolate. Nice man.

It's time to go home. Mama's here and Papa's here. Mama's cryin'. Papa's bein' strong.

Little John's got an iron cage on his arm, an iron cage on his leg, and a little pile of cars in a box. A small red bus. A little digger with tracks and a bucket. A fire engine.

As they leave, the nurse with the light moustache follows them to the stairs.

*Would you like to leave the toys for the other children?*

Papa don't do nothin'. Mama don't do nothin'.

Little John, he's only five. What can he do?

Moustache-nurse reaches out, takes the bus, the digger and the red fire engine.

Papa still don't do nothin'. Mama don't do nothin' only cry.

Little John's barely five, but his eyes meet moustache-nurse and somehow she ain't sneerin' so much no more.

Maybe they'll meet again some day. Who knows?