

Pistachio

1.

MATTHEW: When I think about it now, it seems pretty clear to me, I think anyway, that my life has defined by absence? People they I suppose are always coming and going, and my Granny she became one of those people. After you know. And she did send a Christmas Card every so often but my Mam she just threw them in the bin. And so absent she stayed until a few years ago when I'm stuck in my college apartment and you know you can guess why I was stuck there and I think during all that fuck this for a lark and I finally work up the courage. The courage to give her a call.

2.

ALICE: Hello

MATTHEW: Hello?

ALICE: Who is this?

MATTHEW: Matthew. It's Matthew, Granny. Christopher's son.

ALICE: Ah.

3.

MATTHEW: Tell me, what was he like?

ALICE: He had blonde hair. Like yours. And bright green eyes almost like a lizard... Have you nothing better to do than bother an old woman?

MATTHEW: Is that all I am to you? A botheration.

ALICE: I've things to do.

MATTHEW: Like what?

ALICE: I'm fixing my fence. Some youths kicked a ball through it. Hole the size of a comet in it.

MATTHEW: You shouldn't be out fixing fences...

ALICE: Who are you to tell me what I should and shouldn't do hm?

MATTHEW: At least get Aunt Helen to do it.

ALICE: Helen. Won't even come into the house. Stands on the door with a pillowcase over her face.

MATTHEW: That's for your own good.

ALICE: I'm dying already amn't I?

MATTHEW: Wow

4.

ALICE: Surely you've read Chekhov?

MATTHEW: Who's he?

ALICE: I am in mourning for my life.

MATTHEW: Granny enough of that -

ALICE: That's a quote. The Seagull. Have you read anything?

MATTHEW: I prefer the motion pictures.

ALICE: Not even Heaney? Eavan Boland?

MATTHEW: Not since the leaving cert.

ALICE: Good grief and you're Irish as well. That's sacrilege.

MATTHEW: Right okay where should I start then? With Boland or Heaney?

ALICE: Well the beginning would be good wouldn't it?

MATTHEW: How's your hip?

ALICE: Sore. How's yours?

MATTHEW: Youthful.

ALICE: Cherish it.

MATTHEW: Did Auntie Helen get you the right bits this week?

ALICE: I asked for cherries. She got me cherry pie filling. The woman's a dunce.

MATTHEW: Did you specify fresh cherries?

ALICE: If you write cherries down on a list you shouldn't have to specify fresh cherries.

MATTHEW: Okay.

5.

ALICE: Shirley told me this.

MATTHEW: How are you talking to Shirley?

ALICE: We call to each other from across the fence.

MATTHEW: Good.

ALICE: Don't worry I'm not breathing down her neck.

MATTHEW: I didn't say you were.

ALICE: You insinuated it.

MATTHEW: She told you something...

ALICE: She tells me the husband Frank's started to lose his mind and I mean who hasn't recently? But he's always been a crap, Frank. When your grandfather was alive they'd drink themselves stupid and sing all night.

MATTHEW: Really?

ALICE: Sitting in the garage with a pack of six each playing cards. Every Thursday night for fifty years.

MATTHEW: Do you miss Granda?

ALICE: What's the good in missing someone?

MATTHEW: Okay.

ALICE: I miss having someone to fix the fence but I can do it myself.

MATTHEW: Feminism. Nice.

ALICE: So Frank's started to wander she says. She found him in his dressing gown on the lawn one morning just staring up into the sky saying the clouds look like jellyfish. Poor Shirley's awful worried. I said to her why doesn't she just go see her shrink? Imagine, 84 and still sees a shrink.

MATTHEW: What's wrong with that?

ALICE: There comes a time where you're past knowing anything about yourself. Once you're over 80 that's it. Live with it.

BEAT

MATTHEW: Bet you never saw a counsellor in your life did you?

ALICE: I did. After your father died.

MATTHEW: Really?

ALICE: What good did it do? Didn't bring him back did it?

MATTHEW: No.

6.

ALICE: You've a boyfriend?

MATTHEW: Yeah we're like Ross and Rachel on a break.

ALICE: What does that mean? He left you?

MATTHEW: We're figuring it out. If we still want to be together. If we like each other enough or not.

ALICE: Oh you'll spend your whole life wondering if you like him enough or not.

MATTHEW: I think I remember Dad really loved my Mam. Maybe that's my gorgeous pair of rose tinted spectacles but.

ALICE: No he was besotted with her. Truly. I used to think it was because she was the picture of Scarlett O'Hara.

MATTHEW: He had Gone With The Wind on repeat growing up did he?

ALICE: I despise that movie, far too long.

MATTHEW: He was in love with her. Dad. I remember it so clearly isn't that funny? He's not clear anymore to me but how much he loved her is. He used to hold her hand all the time. Like he was afraid to let go.

ALICE: Yes.

MATTHEW: I want what they had. I suppose every child is like that aren't they? What did that psychiatrist call that? Oedipal?

ALICE: My father knocked my mother into oblivion every Friday night, drunk and full of venom. Not every child is as lucky as you.

MATTHEW: Oh. No well. I. Wouldn't say I was that lucky though. In the grand scheme of things.

ALICE: Good memories are better than bad. And they're all better than nothing.

MATTHEW: Did you like your Father?

ALICE: Are you kidding? I danced on his grave.

7.

MATTHEW: I know I know I'm sorry I'm sorry I didn't call I was SWAMPED with college and life and blegh anyway -

ALICE: You could have emailed. Who knows you could have been eaten by a shark?

MATTHEW: Well I'm glad you were concerned, Granny, shows that you care.

ALICE: Why wouldn't I care? You're my grandson.

MATTHEW: The years of not being in touch probably gave that impression.

ALICE: Your mother and I always wrote.

MATTHEW: Yeah I believe that alright. Why'd you never visit?

ALICE: Why would I want to?

MATTHEW: Because we were there. Me and Saoirse.

She doesn't reply.

MATTHEW: I guess. When I think about it now I would have liked to have known you more.

ALICE: You can never really know someone, Matthew. Only get an impression of them.

MATTHEW: Stop being such a stickler, you know what I mean.

ALICE: I do.

MATTHEW: I remember when you did visit you and Granda. And Dad took us up Slieve League and you were terrified of heights do you remember? You held on to me and Saoirse for dear life. Do you remember that? You do remember that don't you?

ALICE: How could I forget? The cliffs! Terrifying. Sheer drops with no barriers.

MATTHEW: There's a fence...

ALICE: A fence!

MATTHEW: And you bought us all ice-cream afterwards. And made each of us get pistachio because it was your favourite.

ALICE: Yes.

MATTHEW: Yes. Yes yes yes.

ALICE: I'll admit I should have seen you both more.

MATTHEW: Yeah.

ALICE: What's Saoirse like?

MATTHEW: She's stubborn and annoying but wickedly funny. Caustic almost. She must get that from you. And she loves English actually. Now she'd know who Chekhov is.

ALICE: Is she doing okay?

MATTHEW: I hope so. She was very young when Dad died.

ALICE: Mhm.

MATTHEW: I'll get her to call you sometime.

ALICE: That would be nice.

MATTHEW: You should get a mobile phone.

ALICE: I don't want one of those. I want to be off the grid.

MATTHEW: Come on Alice who the flip would be tracking you?

8.

ALICE: Have you had many boyfriends?

MATTHEW: One or two.

ALICE: Hm.

MATTHEW: Craig wants to rent a room together, get a dog, a miniature daschund. I don't know if I'm ready for a dog! He wants all these things from life. Like roast dinners and weekends away and a handy job with loads of time off. All sounds gorge but I don't know if it's what I want.

ALICE: What do you want?

MATTHEW: Well I just said, I dunno! That Grandmother is a million dollar question.

ALICE: You don't need to know what you want now. The great blessing of youth nowadays is you can be whatever you want. How lucky you are.

MATTHEW: What would you do differently, if you could?

ALICE: Nothing.

MATTHEW: Nothing? Nothing will come of nothing, girlfriend.

ALICE: You know Lear.

MATTHEW: Did it for my Leaving.

ALICE: I used to teach tenth grade Lear. You should've seen my Goneril. Unparalleled.

MATTHEW: I pictured you more a Cornwall or an Edmund.

ALICE: I am but a bastard.

MATTHEW: He wants to meet me next week. So we can make our decision.

ALICE: What do you want me to say?

MATTHEW: Anything you want to say, Granny.

ALICE: I didn't love enough. 86 years of living and I didn't love enough. Or let enough love in. I should've jumped in the river many times and let the water take me wherever. But I was a coward, Matthew. Don't make that same mistake.

MATTHEW: Why did you? Make that mistake?

ALICE: I thought feeling nothing was better than feeling anything at all.

PAUSE

MATTHEW: Is that why you cut us off?

ALICE: I didn't cut you off.

MATTHEW: You did.

ALICE: You remind me of him. You all always reminded me of him.

MATTHEW: Do you not want to be reminded of him?

ALICE: No.

MATTHEW: I do. I do all the time.

Pause.

9.

ALICE: Well?

MATTHEW: We decided not to. Craig's not happy, neither am I but. I decided I want to see the world when this is all over. By myself.

ALICE: And are you happy?

MATTHEW: No. I feel like my guts are gonna fall out.

ALICE: It'll pass.

MATTHEW: What if I've made a mistake?

ALICE: You can always say sorry.

MATTHEW: Didn't you hear that's the hardest word?

ALICE: Promise me on this setting off around the world you'll stop off in Maine.

MATTHEW: Don't worry. It's top of my list.

ALICE: Come in the Autumn. Portland's at its best in the Autumn.

MATTHEW: Sure thing.

10.

MATTHEW: I think that at this point in my conversations with Granny I want to say to you that she is still and remains to this day a massive fucking mystery to me. She won't listen to this so I can curse here. And maybe she's so unreachable in my head because of my Dad but every time that phone rings I'm still shocked that it's her. Cause in my mind she's this massive owl, Alice she's a huge huge owl perched inside a tree on the other end of the Atlantic and I can't reach her. Can't get up high enough. She'd say, she did say, it's foolish to think you'll ever understand anyone. That's a very Granny saying though, it's like it helps her, stay in her fortress or something. But maybe she's right because even now from when I'm recording this it's so clear she makes no sense to me.

My Mam, around Repeal time, said to me and Saoirse well your Grandmother over there in America she had an abortion once. And the way she says America it's as if: of course they be doing that over in America. And I won't humour my mother by asking her when or where or how but I did get Saoirse to ask her when where and how and apparently it was in the early 60s and she was in college and that's all my Mam knew. And I will never ask my Granny about it, I mean can you imagine the deathly silence she'd shoot down that phone line? Fucking hell I wouldn't eat for a week, my stomach would be in bits.

But I think about that all the time, how my Granny is this whole life that I'll never know. Maybe I was robbed of it but even then still she's so old, how can we from a distance of such time ever really understand?

Protesting against Vietnam, teaching teaching and teaching, gossiping with the neighbours, growing up on a potato farm, I mean have you ever heard anything more Irish?

But if I could I would ask her now a hundred thousand questions. Why an abortion? Was it awful your Dad being the way he was? Did you love a hundred thousand times before you met Granda? Tell me about being a student in the 60s and did you believe in the sexual revolution and did you take part even? Did you always love pancakes for breakfast? What's your thoughts on Hilary Clinton? Did you ever get sick of being a teacher for fifty years and what was the worst part about being a parent and how could you bear it when Dad passed away? And I know you told us before why you left us but could you tell it again and have it make more sense? Do you dream of Dad? Because I haven't ever been able to.

Even as a kid when I could actually remember him as a as a force in my life I'd never dream of him. Well I dreamt all the time of this crushing feeling, of being alone on a boat in the middle of nowhere, it's calm but there's no one there and I'd have to go in and sleep beside my Mam to try and feel okay. And it's funny because I really only miss my Dad now when I'm really happy. When I'm full to bursting I'll think: he should be here, smiling with me. But this isn't about me. And it isn't about him. So let's go back to her.

MATTHEW: Hey Granny, sorry I missed your call. Work have now asked me to work Thursdays so we'll have to find a new day to call. How about Mondays? I love Mondays they're fresh. Said nobody ever. Did you get the cake I sent you? A bakery in Portland did deliveries. To celebrate your first vaccine dose! Amazing woo hoo I wish I was 86 so I could be vaccinated. I told Saoirse that we've been in touch and she told me this story about the time you sent us two nutcrackers for Christmas one year. Not an actual like nutcracker you sent us nutcrackers like in that ballet Barbie movie. I think I still have mine in the attic at home. Somehow a nutcracker is a very you present. Rambling now gotta blast, talk soon. Happy Vaccine! Happy cake!

12.

ALICE: Good evening. I got your cake. It was very dry. I hope you didn't spend too much money on that. The vaccine lady, lovely woman from the Philippines, told me her husband died of this disease. I held her hand as she told me and you know it felt good, to try just give a little bit of comfort. I got Helen to post you a book. Tell me when it arrives. Love, Granny.

13.

MATTHEW: Little Women? You sent me Little Women?

ALICE: It's a classic. And I thought for a beginner like you a good place to start.

MATTHEW: I've seen the movie.

ALICE: The Hepburn version?

MATTHEW: The Saoirse Ronan.

ALICE: Well you can post it back if you're going to be ungrateful.

MATTHEW: No no no I look forward to reading it, every night before I sit down to sup I shall read a chapter.

ALICE: Good.

14.

MATTHEW: Did you get my email?

ALICE: I did. Lovely photo of him.

MATTHEW: What age was he?

ALICE: 8 or 9 maybe. Late 70s anyway.

MATTHEW: Who's the woman in it?

ALICE: That's my sister Betty. You must have seen her before? She lives in Colorado, she's a goat farm.

MATTHEW: She doesn't look anything like you.

ALICE: Good. She's a harsh face.

MATTHEW: You're not close?

ALICE: She's a Republican.

MATTHEW: God forbid.

ALICE: She dated your Grandfather before me. Though he said they never even kissed. She said she never even held his hand.

MATTHEW: I never knew that.

ALICE: There's a lot you don't know.

MATTHEW: Yeah.

ALICE: Your father had his first girlfriend at ten years old. He brought her home for dinner once and told me I'd to make her a casserole because casserole was the only thing she'd eat. I made meatloaf. He was furious.

MATTHEW: He was a ladies man? Wow.

ALICE: You don't take after him.

MATTHEW: Unfortunately.

ALICE: Can't remember her name now. Jennifer maybe. Tiny thing with brown hair. He cried when they broke up. She dumped him, I think. I told him ten is far too young to be heartbroken.

MATTHEW: He seemed kinda sensitive, from what I remember.

ALICE: He was. Then there was a time I used to think he took himself to Ireland to get away from me.

MATTHEW: Weren't your grandparents Irish?

ALICE: From Connemara.

MATTHEW: Why didn't you follow him here?

ALICE: For a time, I foolishly believed in the American experiment.

MATTHEW: Sometimes I don't really understand what you're saying.

ALICE: After he died I thought. Why'd I want to move to a place that killed my only son?

MATTHEW: Yeah. What did Granda work as again?

ALICE: He was a salesman. For this funny little shoe company.

MATTHEW: I'd love to have met him.

ALICE: You met your Grandfather.

MATTHEW: I was so young. I just remember he had massive hands.

ALICE: Sincere. Sincerity above all his best trait. Big brown eyes like a Labrador and a goofy walk like Big Foot.

MATTHEW: Did he read a lot of books?

ALICE: He wouldn't read a menu.

MATTHEW: Do you really not miss him?

ALICE: No, I do. Here and there. He always made the coffee in the morning, I swear mine doesn't taste the same.

MATTHEW: Dad when I was very little used to sit with me in my room and he taught me how to not be afraid of the dark. He used to say that if ever I got scared all I had to do was close my eyes and know that he'd be right there. And I wouldn't be afraid of the dark anymore. That's kinda horrible now looking back isn't it?

ALICE: That's funny.

MATTHEW: What?

ALICE: His father did the same thing with him.

MATTHEW: No! Really?

ALICE: Your father was terrified of the dark. Your grandpa let him watch some horror movie or some such and that ruined him. Rosemary's Baby maybe.

MATTHEW: That's amazing, I never knew.

ALICE: How could you? Are you on Facebook?

MATTHEW: Yes. Why?

ALICE: Betty has Facebook you should google her. She'd love to talk to you. She'll show you pictures of her goats and tell you how much she loves George W Bush.

MATTHEW: Maybe I'll hit her up someday.

ALICE: You shouldn't be on that Facebook anyway it's dangerous.

MATTHEW: You've an account!

ALICE: Your aunt Helen set that up for me, I don't use it. Stealing your data to rig elections.

MATTHEW: They can have my data sure it's of no use to me.

ALICE: Do you read The New York Times?

MATTHEW: No.

ALICE: You should.

15.

ALICE: Frank has dementia.

MATTHEW: No. Did Shirley tell you?

ALICE: Distraught. But I suppose we all die sometime.

MATTHEW: Poor Frank. Not really surprising I mean he did see Jellyfish in the sky... What are you up to today?

ALICE: I've baked a loaf of bread. I've a new book of crosswords. Might mow the lawn.

MATTHEW: Don't you be out cutting the lawn let Helen do it.

ALICE: I'm vaccinated now.

MATTHEW: Mowing the lawn doesn't give you covid Granny but you still should take it easy.

ALICE: Plenty of time to take it easy when I'm dead.

MATTHEW: Right fine fair enough should know by now there's no talking to you.

ALICE: Any word from Craig?

MATTHEW: None.

ALICE: He'll come back.

MATTHEW: I broke up with him.

ALICE: They always come back.

MATTHEW: Uh huh. Maybe in the 1950s they did but now? There's too much choice, the world's too big.

ALICE: I've been dreaming recently. Must be that vaccine.

MATTHEW: I didn't know dreams are a side effect.

ALICE: I haven't dreamt in forty years. Now every night's a vision.

MATTHEW: Anything interesting?

ALICE: No.

MATTHEW: Pity. You could have LSD dreams that'd be fun.

ALICE: Have you ever done LSD?

MATTHEW: No.

ALICE: I guessed that.

16.

MATTHEW: I do go to America. I want to. Stop here and say that to you. I do go. Once they reopen the borders I go for three weeks towards the end of 2021. Granny meets me at the airport, she's driven to collect me and I come to realise her driving is a fucking terrifying prospect. I go for Thanksgiving and leave just before Christmas. We talk late into the night and drink coffee and cream and she shows me her garden and her books and she makes me read Shakespeare which's fucking deathly and we fall out and argue all the time but it's comfortable and it's right and it makes sense that she's my Grandmother. She tells me one morning sitting on the porch drinking this coffee that's like tar that she feels they never really left her my Dad and Granda. That she never really feels anyone ever leaves you maybe. Not when you've an imagination. I

wonder now did she know that I wouldn't see her again. In October last year she took a fall. And she lasts for a week but we know she's going to die. I thought about trying to fly over to catch her before she goes but it didn't make sense. So Saoirse and I we sent a video which Aunt Helen played to her. She died two days later. So I didn't really get to say goodbye. Didn't get to tell her that she was glorious scary challenging difficult and dynamite and that it was really a blessing to get to know her finally. So that's why I'm doing this, making this. Telling you all about her because I thought wouldn't it be nice for everyone else to know what a nightmarish dream she could be? To say goodbye properly. Because getting to know my Granny it felt like filling in the blanks of my life, the bits that had left me behind. Saoirse says sometimes she feels it was weak of me to come to know a woman who ran away from her grandkids, when they most needed her. I get that I do but then I know too that for the first time I feel rooted in in my family, one big transatlantic part of it. And how getting to know Alice it left all these breadcrumbs to my Dad and following them I suppose I've found a glimpse of a life that I've been denied. It's as if now when I think about it that Granny's absence now is a glorious one, where there was this empty annoyance now all I feel is luck. That I took the chance to get over that grudge, that I knew her, that the grief I feel over her loss is now a privilege. Cause I got the tiniest little look at a complicated grumpy sharp massive life. There's one last thing I'd like to leave you with. It's how I'd like her to be remembered. Thank you.

Into...

ALICE: Is it late over there?

MATTHEW: No it's morning I'm just having my breakfast are are you okay?

ALICE: I had to speak to you.

MATTHEW: Is everything alright?

ALICE: I had the most beautiful dream. About your father. We were dancing. And I wanted to tell you. Before I forget it.

MATTHEW: Please do.

ALICE: Are you busy?

MATTHEW: No of course not go on. Please.

ALICE: You don't have to entertain me I shouldn't have called this is madness...

MATTHEW: If you haven't noticed by now Granny madness runs in the family so come on I'm all ears...

ALICE: I was floating through the stars and a jellyfish flew by and waves her arms at me. And everything is twinkling and the stars are singing. Ella Fitzgerald and Nina Simone and suddenly I fall onto Earth and land on a mountain and I hear your father say my name. Hiya Mom and we're standing on a hill with the bluest backdrop full of sky. And there's a tree, an old oak tree with leaves of auburn and red and they're crinkled like paper as they drift to the floor. And your father stands there, with his green smiling eyes and he's

not mangled like he was when the car swallowed him whole he's smiling and happy to see me and I him and he reaches out his hand pink fingernails like the day he was born and I take it and then he's you. That imitation of his face, the same smile hidden inside those eyes. And we dance on the carpet of auburn, slow and steady and these old bones rattle with the violins rising. And you and him become one and here we are together dancing, all the time dancing. The sun sets and the purple moon rises and we move and sway together and for a time, a moment, a dream, all is right and the world finally stops turning. And the leaves crinkle under our feet and a Jellyfish swims up into the stars and the dream the dance it felt as if it never even ended.

Slowly we start to hear sounds of the sea and waves crashing on a shore and seagulls in the distance and out of this memory of a day on a cliff many years ago we hear a voice, an American voice, the voice of a cherished Dad and Son say:

'Mom they won't fall in - there's a fence! Matthew, Saoirse! Come on it's time to go your Granny wants to get some ice cream.'

Hold in the memory. And, end.

In Loving Memory of Piper Laurie

1932 – 2023.

Pistachio by Ultan Pringle is presented by LemonSoap Productions

Starring Piper Laurie and Ultan Pringle

With the voice of Justin O'Brien

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