



SOME HAD BEGUN THEIR DAY AT 7, OTHERS AT 5, CLEARING SNOW from the walkway, vacuuming around the casket, polishing the hearse. It was now after 10 in the morning, and they had their first chance for a break.

Across Smith Street, St. Casimir's Church was filled with incense and with mourners. Women in fur collars and men in woolen vests, mostly elderly members of Providence's Lithuanian community, sat scattered in the wooden pews. Back at the Russell J. Boyle & Son funeral home, the pallbearers had waited until the last of these well-wishers had left for the church before they settled the woman in the powder-blue dress into her eternal bed. One placed an inlaid box filled with Lithuanian soil next to her hands; another turned the crank that lowered her into the coffin; another covered her stocking feet with white satin. They carried her to the hearse and drove

the short block to the church, where the congregation was by then waiting. When they had safely wheeled the coffin down the center aisle, one of Boyle's men took his place in the front pew, to attend to the grieving family, and to remind the mourners when to kneel, when to stand. The priest then began his words of remembrance in the woman's native tongue.

As ceremoniously as they had filed in, the other pallbearers walked straight back down the aisle and across the street to Mell's Diner, where they commandeered the counter and ordered breakfast — ham-and-egg sandwiches, Italian toast, coffee. They read the paper, talked business, asked for a refill. Then, seamlessly — as if knowing from years of practice just when the priest would be finishing his farewell — the men in black coats stood up from their stools, adjusted their hats and went back to work.

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