

The Child We Lost 1963

La Dispute

There were shadows in the bedroom
Where the light got thrown by the lamp on the
nightstand
On your mother's side, after midnight, still
You can see it all
You can see it all
And the closet in the corner
On the far back shelf with the keepsakes, she hid
That box there full of letters of regret
By the pictures of the kids

You get faint recollections of your mother's sigh,
countryside drive
And the landscape seen from the window of the backseat
with some flowers in a basket

That afternoon after school you and your older sisters
Found your parents in the kitchen at the table
Father lifting off the lid of the box

And a hush fell over everything like a funeral prayer
A reverence, ancestral, heavy in the air

Though you didn't understand what it meant
That they never said her name aloud around you
Even sitting at the table with her things they'd kept
You recall faintly cards, tiny clothes, and the smell
of the paint in the upstairs bedroom
Until then you didn't know that's what the box had held

Your parents tiptoeing slowly around always speaking in
code

No, they never said her name aloud around you
Only told you it was perfect where your sister went
And you didn't understand why it hurt them so much then
that she'd come and left so soon
Could only guess inside your head at what a
"stillbirth" meant
Only knew that mother wept

You watched while father held her, said "Some things
come but can't stay here."
You saw a brightness. Like a light through your eyes
closed tight then she tumbled away.

From here, some place
To remain in the nighttime shadows she made
To be an absence in mom, a sadness hanging over her
Like some pentacostal flame, drifting on and off
She was "Sister," only whispered.
Sometimes "Her" or
"The Child We Lost."

You were visions
A vagueness, a faded image
You were visions

You were a flame lit that burned out twice as brightly
as the rest of us did
When you left, you were light, then you tumbled away

There are shadows that fall still here at a certain
angle
In the bedroom on the nightstand by your mother's side
From the light left on there

There's the box in the closet, all the things kept
And the landscape where she left
Flowers on the grave, marble where they etched that
name
And mother cried the whole way home

But she never said it once out loud
On the way back home from where you thought they meant
When they said where sister went

After grandpa got hospice sick and he couldn't fall
sleep
They wheeled his stretcher bed beside her at night
And I saw the light

On the day that he died
By their bed in grandma's eyes
While us grandkids said our goodbyes

She said "don't cry"
Somewhere he holds her
Said a name I didn't recognize
And the light with all the shadows combined