

Wake

by Gary Moshimer

At my daughter's wake Mr. Aleford, her teacher, poked out his pointy nose, sniffing my cologne. How could I be plastered with this, at a time like this? Well, dear Sir, Two reasons. One, to hide the booze. And two, because my wife and I had made feverish love that morning, my freshly shaved face rubbing hers and almost making fire. How could we make love, no *fuck*, at a time like this? Sucked together by tragedy, no? Like magnets and fragments, no? To make a new life, no? To punish one another? Yes.

Her face was porcelain, an off violet. A big boy had pushed her on the swing, over the top, the chain wrapping her delicate neck. During efforts to free her the angels had descended and sat around her, softly touching with their wings. Letting her white blonde hair trickle through their fingers like spun gold as they ascended with her unblemished soul.

I looked at her eyelashes, transparent like the spider web I'd seen glinting that morning in the garden. I was counting petals which had fallen off her favorite flowers. Seven, like her. I swallowed them and a rash formed on my cheeks in the heart shape of her face.

The purple of her eyelids could not be hidden by the makeup. When I lightly touched them they opened slightly. Her eyes looked alive, the color of ice lit from within. I kept trying to close them but they opened. My wife's eyes grew dark and sunk from terror, trying to retreat inside, pouring tears inside and out. I stared at the funeral director. He shrugged. I had to hold my wife up. The room went silent. Would the girl wake up? She would not.

On the drive home my wife repeated, "The pictures."

At home it was cold and silent. We were poor, but we knuckled each other to remind us of what we had and didn't. We had one another, we didn't have a daughter. Part of her face, with an eye opened, remained on my cheek.

When it was dark we were a mess of tangled limbs and violent sex ensued. In starlight our eyes glistened. Silver and gold; it was what we had. All we had were our reflections in each other's eyes, our ragged breath. I thought about the chain around her neck, and when I did, I yanked at the one with the locket around my wife's neck. It broke in my hands. We turned on the light and opened it and looked at our daughter's picture. In it her eyes were closed. "Goddamn it," I said.

Naked, I ran upstairs and got the box of photos. We arranged them on the bed, these pictures of our daughter, her whole life. In every one her eyes were closed. How did she do that? It was a family joke. We held on to each other, goosebumps flaring, spines tingling, and waited for them to open.

