

# 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

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