

THE BRACELET

Visiting my sister in the hospital was hard for me so I just stopped all together. I had no desire to go or to see her that way. My love for her is more abstract than physical anyways. I don't need to be there to still be there.

At the time of her birth I was two years old. Now we are both old and grey. I try not to stare at that black dress in my closet. I feel like springtime is naked. My husband, a fairly successful businessman, still works at home. I work in the yard. I work on myself.

When my sister loses her life I fear I won't be able to take it. That's why I avoid it. I'm not avoiding her. There I go again being selfish. It's disturbing. I'm so miserable and so tired.

...

My husband holds an umbrella for me as I get into the car. He stares at me with compassion. The woman in the mirror resembles me but I do not recognize her. Eastern european features but no light.

The doctor said she put up a fair fight. It was just time for her to escape this world. I had been delusional not to go. Many people had been puzzled by my actions but we all handle grief differently. I exclude myself from blame. I learned long ago that shadows follow me wherever I go. Speaking of, there are clouds in the sky and the rain still pours down. The minister thinks of new and creative ways to rearrange the alphabet. I kick a pebble on the ground. I always play games and avoid eye contact. I have no friends here. Some people are hysterical. Others are prejudiced. None knew her like I did. That would be impossible. We had solidarity in her vulnerability and my strength. Still, even on this incredibly sad day, I can't let myself fall apart and I am judged rather harshly for it.

When we left the crowd to go home the car was silent for a while. Then my husband asked what I wanted for supper. I wasn't hungry but I told him pierogi. He needs to feel helpful in times like these.

We enter our two bedroom house. I grimace at the plate. I try to eat but my teeth hurt. That happens when I'm stressed. My mood is dark and our table is silent.

After he goes to bed I'm still up. I stare at the sweet soul I married. He's been charming since birth. He's always kind to strangers. I met him at the park, staring on shyly. Now I'm an old lady and he's still all I have. I can't help but think that I've made him suffer. He's slowly losing his interests. He doesn't even play chess anymore. Thank God he took pity on me. Thank God that after all this time he still eases my worried mind and much more. He gives me joy or something close to it. He's a light to the neglected. He's like the sun to my wild thorns.

It was nearly midnight when I laid down next to him.

"Can't sleep?" He asked.

"I can't." I replied. "Yet I'm so tired. She's really dead."

I cuddle up next to him.

"I think we really need to get you some sleeping pills. Let's call the doctor in the morning.

"I hate doctors." I groan. "I hate those pills. I know it's not right. It's not responsible. But still."

I bury myself into his shoulder.

"Alright." He says. "Well maybe some tea?"

"I would like that very much.

While he brews it I pull out the old photo albums.

“I can’t believe she and I grew up like that in a house so small. We shared a room the size of our bathroom. Maybe I should see a doctor. Just of the shrinking variety. Only I won’t know what to say.”

The telephone rang. That was unusual. It was too late for telemarketers.

“Hello?” I answered.

“Is this Charlotte?”

I was tempted to tell them that they had the wrong number.

“This is her.” I said. My heart was beating a million miles a minute.

I smiled sadly at my husband. I knew he would protest. He is old fashioned. He feels it is rude to call after nine. Maybe it was an emergency though. Maybe I shouldn’t have answered the phone. Maybe I should have said that my name was Charlotte.

“My name is Darlene. I have something of your sister’s. Can we meet?”

...

I met her the next day. I felt she knew my sister well

“She was saving this for your birthday but...”

But I never came. I opened the parcel. Inside was a silver bracelet. I clumsily put it on. I would wear it as my penance. I tried to forget about her but she never forgot about me. The tears finally hit me. I let myself be the vulnerable one now that she’s gone.