

DAUGHTER DROWNED.

By dadio

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The silence of her frightens you. You stare at her laid out body and feel the want to hold her and kiss her but you know she's dead and that she will feel nothing of your love again or sense your warmth. Drowned. So suddenly, so quickly. There one moment laughing and full of life and then gone. You gaze at her, at her flesh, at her fingernails. She kept herself so clean, so neat and tidy. The fingernails are trimmed exactly, no rough edges, no uneven part, all just so. Perfection. You run a finger along her ribs; sense the bones beneath the skin. So young, no fresh, no new. You lean forward and kiss her brow. Cold and still. The ginger hair with its boyish cut feels soft as if you had just washed and combed it. No, some other did that, combed it so. You stand back and take in each aspect of her. Her head is reclined upon a small pillow so that the head is tilted forward slightly; the eyes are closed as if in sleep, the pale eyelids like small smooth shells. You lean forward slowly and kiss each one. Secretly you hope that she wakes up and opens her eyes, but she doesn't, she just lies there motionless, lifeless. You gave birth to her, brought her into the world, heard her first cries, saw her first clenched and unclenched fists, the first sign of her lips opening and closing seeking your breasts. She seeks them no more. Seeks nothing now; all seeking is at an end. Her thin arms are laid down by her sides, the hands slightly turned outward as if to say, look at me now Mother, see I am perfected. Not yet a woman, but just about to enter that arena, just about to start her menstrual cycle, her first feeling of breast about to begin. All stopped before it could blossom; stilled in the bud. She has your nose, not her father's. Your lips, not his. Those lips, wanting to kiss and be kissed, wanting once to suck, are still and chilled now. You want to kiss them, want them to open and her words to speak, her tongue to poke out at you as she would often in fun. The lips are sealed. She speaks no more, nor laughs nor cries. You cradled her when she had her first bleed, that frightened her, thought she was about to die. You ought to have warned her, have mentioned the facts of life to her, but you didn't, you wanted her to remain your little girl, your baby, not become a woman, not grow up and become lost to you. You bite your lips. She is lost to you now. Lying there on that marble slab like so much wasted flesh. You cry. For the first time you begin to let the tears flow, let them just come, no holding them back now, no more pretence, no more trying to be brave, you feel them on your cheeks, the dampness, the eyes watering to such a degree that she becomes a blur. You wipe your eyes with your hand; want to see each aspect of her before they cover her over again with the sheet, before she's taken from your sight forever. You can hear yourself cry now, the sound is wounding, as if someone tore at your soul. No one comes; they leave you alone, leave you to this last meeting, this final confrontation with your daughter. How still she is. So motionless. How pale, how thin. Why her? Why now? You lean close to her chest, put your ear there in the hope you may hear her heart beat, some small hope that the doctors are wrong, but there is no heartbeat, nothing. She looks at peace, you think. Yes, at peace. As if in sleep. She used to sleep like that when you would enter her room to see if she was all right at night and there she would be sleeping like this. As if nothing could disturb. Nothing to disturb. Nothing. Your tears have fallen on her cheek as if she was crying too. You wipe them gently away with your fingers. You whisper to her. You utter words in her ear. Save a place for me where you are, you say softly, keep a place for me to be with you. You want her to nod her head or open her lips and say, yes, Mother, of course I will. But she doesn't, she just

lies motionless and silent. The silence of her frightens you. You move away as the door opens and the others enter. They gather around dressed in black like you, as silent as she, but alive, thinking, feeling, sensing, unlike her. You wish you could be laying beside her now, side-by-side, close in death as you had been in life, hands touching. They begin to murmur, the others, gently whisper to you, time to go, time to leave her be. But you can't, the effort of leaving tears at your very being, drags at your soul, pulls you into the darkness. Someone covers her with the white sheet and she is gone and all you see is the outline of perfection dressed in white like some bride only there is no wedding, no bridegroom, only the dark reaper, edging his way closer into the room as you are pulled gently away and out of the small room with the last image of your daughter sealed in your mind.

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