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