

What the Dead Do to the Living

I wonder if she still smokes and I think why not and how it used to be that anyone who smelled stale reminded me of her. Now it happens only once in awhile and I almost miss it, remembering the hesitation I'd feel when I'd lean to kiss her good-night, holding my breath, and then giving in and breathing anyway because it was her smell.

I couldn't wait to grow into her, those coral nails and pearly Florida toes that peeked from silver sandals decorated with rhinestones, pebbles, shells. I wanted to wear sandals like that someday. I couldn't wait. Maybe that was the problem. We'd go shopping and she'd complain that I picked out the most expensive thing in the store. I just wanted to look glamorous like her, drinking cocktails, watching soaps.

I see her now, from the old picture at the beach where I can see myself in her face. I see her now across an endless golf green where sandpits fall into the ocean, paths paved by playing cards. She's wearing the red bathing suit with the matching scarf, the hi-cut low-cut suit with little laces at the thigh and bodice. One hand on hip, the other tosses back handfuls of mixed nuts. Bubby watches me, laughing, loving me as she never did, loving my high heels and blonde hair. She cheers my tight skirts, erotica, and push-up bras. As the only granddaughter, I was the natural choice to carry on the partygirl gene, but she had her doubts, me such a chubby girl and those braces and those glasses.

I feel her winking. And sometimes feel her jealous fingers at the clasp at the back of my neck, reaching for the diamonds she couldn't take with her.