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SO AND SO AND SO

by

Sam Thayn

"This lost person I loved. Loved for a hundred years."

—*Bob Hicok, Elegy with Lies*

We made people out of paper maché and toilet paper tubes. It was something we did in the mornings before we went to work sometimes, just to be funny. She was crafty and I played along. Our neighbors stood along the windowsill: fat Craig Arnold with his horizontally striped shirts and old lady Margot, down to the bifocals or trifocals (how can you ever tell?). And the children of the neighborhood, who sometimes came to dig up our yard or throw toilet paper over the roof: Sandy, Rick, Daniel, David.

Everyone sees the sundown and it gets the most press: big and purple and bright golds. But sunrises are quiet, modest, the lightest pink and the whitest off-white. I know because our kitchen is off-white, and it almost matches. I can see her painting in her old denim overalls with my two hand marks on her bottom pockets. I would give anything to put my hands there again, to hold her on the ladder, to hear her protest and then laugh. Sometimes, alone,

I try to work on Harry Paul's mustache, and it's particularly hard. How do you make a paper corkscrew? She would know.

I'm trying the fetal position while taking my resting heart rate. I want to know if it really works, if there's something to it, if it isn't just a wives' tale, like the one about how walking works both sides of your brain. So I'm curled under the kitchen table and watching the sunrise fall over the edge, onto the kitchen floor we sanded and primed and painted. So much paint in us. Paint on the walls and floors and in the lines of our knuckles and paint in her hair when I took her in surprised and solemn faces, right here on this floor, where I can still see her. She isn't looking at me yet, but she will, if I watch hard enough.

There's nothing better than her name, written in text messages and emails and the love notes on the back of event programs. L-U-C-Y they always say, spelling it out for me and the whole world because she was a whole-world kind of person and still so small I could count her freckles. I count them and count them. When I close my eyes, they are the stars. When I climb up the stairs, they are in the steps. When I move her boxes in the attic, they glow in the dark. From the windows, they are fireflies.

There's still a place in the house I don't go, the pink room, where she is most often. We don't talk because she's reading *A Room With a View*, and I know better than to interrupt her while she's reading. Her legs are crossed, and her elbows are sloped at her side and her fingers, each painted a different color, are clutching at her book. And her brow is darkened. I sometimes try to get her to look at me but she never does. She is holy in her attention and I see the part in her hair. I see the earrings I bought her. I

see the long birthmark on the back of her leg, a line I used to run my thumb along. When she's not reading, she's sleeping, or just waking up, half covering her face against the light, her hair tossed. And when she's not sleeping she's looking out the window, seeing things I don't. Seeing what's missing.

Maybe if we'd had a baby. Some forgotten happiness, some peace of mind that could make her right in a way she never was. And I could take care of the baby and coo at her and keep her quiet at night when mom was gone, because she'd always be gone and I'd always rock the baby to sleep. She'd have mom's freckles and they'd be counted first thing after fingers and toes.

Old lady Margot asked me at the thing if I could ever get married again, and I told her I couldn't. My dad always said he could, and he did, but not me. I mate for life, I said to Margot, while we both ate croissants and smiled and smiled. But I do. I feel like she's pushing out of my heart and coming back about eighty times a minute. And when my heart stops I'll go looking for her past the pink room upstairs, past the first place I told her I loved her, past the last place she turned her back on me in bed.

I hope she finds what she's looking for. I hope she finds a big piece of pie, or an open window, or a weeping willow to sit in. I hope she finds a whole field of sunflowers that don't make her sneeze. I hope she finds God and sends Him our way, me and the baby's, so the lonely nights don't feel so lonely. So I can get help counting an infinity of freckles. So and so and so, I coo.

When I wake up, I turn over in bed and watch the sunrise line the blinds. I feel her face burned into my shoulder. I feel her feet pressing against the top of mine. And I remember that she's gone

again. That she's not coming back. And I can hear the baby now stirring, now crying softly in the other room.