

Chapter 6 Brother

Frank arrives shortly after we do. A new nurse rolls him in and parks his bed by the big window. She is beaming. The room is bursting with light. We have come from the underworld and the radiance hurts our eyes. Our nurse promises to return shortly with new bedding. She asks if she can bring us anything. No one has an answer. We are dazzled by the light, by the beauty of the day intruding on our anguish. The morning could not be more oblivious to our moment. Death could not be more irrelevant to the world's agenda. We are tempted to stare at that brilliant world. Tempted to lose ourselves in the architecture of the urban carnival opening beneath a blue, blue sky, empty of pain. Where life appears unstoppable. Never ending. We are afraid to look at him. Afraid to see and feel. Our minds, exhausted as they are, eagerly assist in avoiding Frank. Suggesting we still have time. Suggesting that death is still approaching. Maybe caught in a traffic jam. We have time. Time to watch the scintillating November light fall on his face. Time for the ancestral spirits to arrive. Time for a few stories. The hooded one couldn't possibly steal him from this golden shower. Certainly death waits for nightfall to slip in the back door. Surely we'll have another day with him.

The nurse has barely closed the door when we dare to look his way. And the moment we do he sits up in bed. His eyes open wide and a ground swell convulses through his body. His torso rises and falls. He struggles to breathe and raise himself above the flash flood of blood but fails. It lasts thirty seconds and ends. And when it does, his body falls back on the pillow. Motionless. Breathless. It ends so fast, it is as if the Pacific has heaved its last wave upon the shore and then lies flat and quiet forever. Impossible.

We stood beside the body expecting him to return. We stood there empty and speechless. With no goodbye on our lips. With no "I love you" on the tongue. We stare at him and feel robbed. Just like that, taken, by the magician's sleight of hand. Gone. Gone from this world. The day never blinks.