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My Mother Prays to Dream of Her Dead Father

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MY MOTHER PRAYS TO DREAM OF HER DEAD FATHER

But when she finally pulls over
at the seedy roadside carnival,
stumbles past the giant clicking numbered wheel,
the sway-back pony, the eight-legged calf,
and she finds him,
dipping up beet Borscht
in an oil-stained apron, My god, she says, What are you doing here?,
forgetting it was her will. And what did she expect?
A pearled gate
with auto-trumpet, a tailored
tunic, and 24-hour harp over-intercom?
Then she figures he’s paying a debt;
he was never perfect
even after eulogy upon eulogy
meant to starch and press
his soul; she can still recall
his extravagant failures, her mother’s bruised arms,
the silence he held
like a fist in his mouth.
His purgatory now is shabby carnivals,
motor vehicle lines, bus stops,
this human world
that he’d always thought beneath him.
But this is a dream of the living,
not a reality,
she reminds herself later sipping coffee alone at the sink,

that it’s her sins she’s come to claim,
that for years he will ladle Borscht,
weep into the salty broth, and heaven,
when it finally arrives, will be a stretch of beach,
a dream

of her father, this time holding a golden
gold-eyed fish above his sun-haloed head.