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.