

I Prefer Funerals

by Carolina Luna



And death and I meet so very often.

Diane Wakoski

I don't know. Maybe the thing is that my family is large or it's just that people die all the time. And it seems that with my adolescence, I acquired a right I hadn't sought: the right to go back and forth with my mother on visits to hospitals, funeral parlors and burials.

Funerals are less bothersome: there's coffee and guilt acknowledged. But the hospitals...

Maybe it's that today I'm upset and that makes it impossible for me to stop crying. This week I have already visited I-don't-know-whose daughter with leukemia and dealt with Aunt Bertha's liver transplant. The first clinic wasn't bad; the second sold inedible hero sandwiches.

I don't like crying uncontrollably although, frankly, I have my reasons for being like this, being furious; this is my mother's second suicide attempt in less than a year. The next time, we'll see who calls the doctor, because I won't.

It was better when Daddy was alive. He never let Mom take me to her do's. We used to stay home watching movies. We liked the ones about psychotic murderers a lot.

We both used to try to guess how they would kill the next victim. I suspect that Daddy cheated in the game and had already seen all the movies because he always won.

The day Daddy died my mother was happy. I mean, not happy-happy, but more like fulfilled on the one hand and sad on the other. Her life was consoling the relatives of the ill, the wounded, the

dead, and that day, everyone returned the favor right away. Not even at the parties my Daddy gave did I see as many people as at his burial. Even though most of the people were Mom's acquaintances.

Sometimes at night I hear her come into my room. She takes my pulse, checks my breathing, sighs and leaves.

Most people would have a bad feeling about her attitude —somehow I'm her only chance of being consoled again— but I'm healthy. Thanks to her, no disease threatens me. I know that the sigh is of relief and that's why I'm confident.

Maybe Mom would have preferred that I call somebody to put her in the hospital, but who knows? Since the last time we avoided the issue, I didn't want to risk it. I don't know how to organize these things. The truth is, they bore me; I'm not like her. I go with her on her rounds more out of habit than because I like it. I repeat, given the choice, I prefer funerals. Also, I look good in black and Mom doesn't mind if I dress in style as long as I pick black. It was my cousin who told me that I look good in black, at his father's wake. We went into the back of the little house, and I consoled him in my own way, to good results.

My arms hurt. Mom is thin, but I think people weigh more when they're asleep. There was nothing for it: I had to carry her and wait for the ambulance to arrive. Also, the neighbors...

Jorge is taking a long time. He is the doctor in the family. Mom always torments him with imaginary diseases and he tolerates her. I say they're imag-

inary because my mother has only needed hospitalization when she has tried to kill herself. Poor thing: that must be frustrating.

Finally Jorge comes in with a bad expression on his face.

"I think this time she's gone too far," he says to me. I'm quiet. I stop crying.

"I couldn't do anything," he apologizes.

Surprise confuses me. What was I going to do without her? That is, I don't know how to organize these things and I hate strangers hugging and depositing slobbering kisses on me, with their moist faces, their black clothes that smell of mothballs. And the whole business of the funeral parlor: telephone calls, flowers. My god, the obituaries!¹

"Do you want to go in and see her?"

I answer that I don't, and, not paying any attention to something he's trying to tell me, I move toward the exit. Then I decide to escape, run away, and come back in three days when everything's over. ■■■

NOTES

¹ In Mexico, tradition dictates that condolences be expressed in paid advertisements in the newspapers called "*esquelas*". The closest approximation in English would be "obituaries". [Translator's Note.]

SHORT STORY TAKEN FROM CAROLINA LUNA'S BOOK *PREFIERO LOS FUNERALES* (MEXICO CITY: FONDO EDITORIAL TIERRA ADENTRO, 1996), PP. 9-11.

