Drowning

by Andrew Bowen

I found Mathew face down, cold and ridged like a plastic doll. I had overslept because he never cried—never told me he was hungry. Rodney had to peel my arms from around my son so the paramedics could take him in a blaze of flashing red and white lights.

Rodney and I arrived at the hospital five minutes after they called it. Mathew had drowned in his blankets. I barely remember slapping the doctor's face.

The air is humid with the whimpers and tears of the congregation. I stare at Mathew's blue coffin. Sunlight ignites against the chrome. My eyes burn from sleepless nights. Rodney hooks his fingers around mine. I can't squeeze back.

Mathew would grin at me, all gums and downy glow, and cackle at nothing in particular. My insides fluttered every time he looked at me, as if a tiny stone had plunked into my soul and sent waves through me. He couldn't crawl yet, so he flailed on his stomach as if trying to swim over the carpet.

The minister's voice jars me. “Rest assured, Mathew had a guardian angel on his shoulder that night…” I close my eyes and swallow a knot expanding in my throat. I imagine an angel standing on Mathew's shoulder, pressing him into the sheets as he gasped for air, whispering sweet, holy nothings about a god too bright to see.

He continues. “And now, Mathew is in heaven with our lord—an angel himself, with wings to glide above pain, worry, sorrow…”

He looks down at me. His face crumples beneath a sympathetic

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smile. I can't force one in return so I look away. I glance out the window as light pours in and watch the clouds. All I see are bed sheets flowing in the wind. My fingers curl and my nails cut into my palms. I struggle to breathe and suck in air like a series of rapid hiccups. I picture Mathew thrashing for breath inside heaven's clouds, still unable to swim.