

With Every Word

by Michael Downing

The bedroom was still as our conversation dissolved into a heavy silence broken only by the ticking of the clock on her night table and the occasional sob that hadn't yet been swallowed in her pillow. I stubbed out my cigarette and leaned forward in the chair, watching her expression and wishing I could be there in ways I didn't fully understand any more. I knew she was lonely for words I couldn't find in myself; little white lies that might ease the pain, but there hadn't been honesty between us in years and I was done bending the truth. I could have told her again that everything would be all right, but neither one of us believed the words, so I just stared at the clock through the quiet of the night and watched the minutes fall away like hours. When she finally closed her eyes one last time I wiped off my tears with the back of my hand, took the keys from the glass bowl by the door, and drove away in the big block Buick that had been parked in her garage. I wanted to believe that she hadn't suffered but that was another lie; you want to believe anything that makes you feel better about your mother dying, even when it isn't true.

