

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/4

*Liz Gilmore Williams*

### **The Last Time**

I pushed my sister, April, in her wheel chair from the bedroom into the dining room, where she wanted to chat with her visiting stepson, Matt, and her daughter, Missy. I watched as April, the party girl, smiled and talked to them. It warmed me to see her animated. Her clothes draped around her shrunken figure. After a while, she wanted to return to her bedroom. I wheeled her back.

This weekend, I'd spent at April's home to relieve Missy. Before Matt arrived on Sunday, I'd fixed April an egg topped with a piece of cheese and toast, with one piece of bacon. She had little appetite but ate it all, feeding herself. Her toes curled unusually as she sat in bed, I'd noticed, a sign of imminent death.

After fixing her breakfast, I changed her bed sheets, which were wet again, took them down to the washer, and loaded whatever was there that needed washing. I put a pair of Depends and pajama pants on April so she was dry. If only I could have done more.

With a face once so beautiful you couldn't look away, my sister had wanted her makeup on for Matt's visit. I had washed her face and put on her astringent, she instructing me. Then I'd applied the foundation make-up and blush. She'd fussed at the job I'd done. She'd put her mascara on herself.

After talking together awhile, Matt and Missy joined April and me in the bedroom. Seeing Matt had cheered April and they resumed talking. It was time for me to go. I kissed her lightly on her cheek, so lightly she didn't acknowledge it, a kiss still vivid though seven years old.

As I left the house, for some reason, I opened a drawer in a small wooden chest by the front door. Inside, I found a black-and-white, 8- by 10-inch photo of April's "flight hostess" class of July 1967. April, the tiniest one in the picture, and her classmates wore pillbox hats. I wrote down the date of the graduation on a piece of paper—for the obituary—and put it in my purse. I glanced at the mantelpiece, full of greeting cards and framed pictures, and noticed a photo I'd never seen before, one of Mother and April as a child. Mother wore a long gown, and April, a dressy dress and little straw hat. I took the picture, thinking I'd bring it back next time. As I pulled out of the driveway, I knew it would be last time I'd see my sister. Finally, I cried.