

The Widow

FRANCINE WITTE

She stands straight up for the first time
in years. So many hours spent hunched
over his living corpse. He was stroke-dead
but breathing. Each night she would press
her fingers to his temple. *Please die,*
she would whisper, *please die so I*
can live. By his bed, their wedding photo,
two flowered strangers from forever
ago. Now, at his funeral, she watches
the gravediggers shoveling rich, dark
earth onto his coffin. The slap of dirt
like tapping fingers that will soon close
around him. An hour ago, she stood
by his open coffin, hunched this one last time,
and stroked the flower on his lapel. A final
kiss, a whisper, one last brush against
his temple and the coffin lid closing,
a cold but gentle caress. The polished
wood as strong and solid as the years
she wouldn't leave him, and she was suddenly
grateful for all the things that hold us.