

Approaching the casket he came upon small groups of people talking quietly, laughing occasionally and then looking guiltily around—suddenly conscious of their whereabouts. The masks were hurriedly composed again as inscrutable eyes measured his grief. It's strange how detached from it all I feel, he thought. It's as if I stood off and watched myself, going through the expected motions, the bizarre ritual required by society. A somber attendant whispered softly to those surrounding the casket and they moved away slowly, reluctantly. The curtains were unobtrusively closed behind him so that the curious watching eyes were shut out.

He forced himself to notice the flowers—the intricately arranged masterpieces of the florist's art—the stark white cards hanging conspicuously in front—mementos of people who cared or half feared or felt called upon to make a gesture. His hand brushed the moist satiny smoothness of rose petals, fingered the stubby carnations. His eyes surveyed them, row on row of color, vivid, beautiful, meaningless now. He gazed at the little face beneath him, nestled in the silky opulent interior of the casket. The curly hair was perfectly arranged—in itself convincing of death in a four-year-old. The skin no longer had the clear translucence of healthy childhood—it was like the skin of the doll in her arms—real-looking, yes—but not lifelike. The hands were not the dimpled busy fingers of Cathy, but still, lifeless replicas. A waxen image: this phrase went through his mind. He leaned to kiss the cheek—this too was ritual rather than desire. The flesh was not cold as he had expected but not warm either. It was simply death beneath his lips. It's true, he thought. Now I know, now I am convinced. This then is what the ritual is for—it leaves no doubt—no gay, laughing, elusive shadow to torment the mind. Death must be faced. The ritual forces the mind to face and accept it. It is done. Slowly he turned away.

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NIGHT THOUGHTS

Maurice F. Kenny

The bird aims for the sky
 To dart, and soar, to sing;
 The moth seeks out the lamp
 To warm its frozen wing;
 The night waits on the dawn
 If only to sleep . . .
 But I, awake, seek what
 Beyond my daily keep?
 I can not reach the sky.
 My wings are clipped, lamp-light
 Is dull to me, and dawn,
 O dawn is out of sight.