

## Widower

*Andrew Bomback*

I tell people that I'm a widower, even though  
I've never been married and the dead wife I have in mind is actually alive and well,  
living somewhere in Washington State.  
Washougal. 473 Meridian Road.  
Her zip code is 98671.

We never got married in Jamaica,  
on a whim in the small chapel near our hotel,  
and we never honeymooned in Jersey City just because we wanted to be unique.  
We never discovered our mutual love of Flannery O'Connor's short stories  
in the waiting room of her oncologist, Dr. Neil O'Connor.  
I never tried to cheer her up by saying,  
"Well, think about it this way: If it weren't for the cancer,  
we'd never realize all the discussions we could have about 'Good Country People,'  
could we?"

We did love each other, though.  
And I did try to shave every night,  
so that when we kissed before going to sleep,  
I didn't irritate the sensitive skin around her mouth.  
Even though my skin is probably just as sensitive as hers.  
Now that I'm a widower,  
I can shave at a more natural frequency of once every fourth or fifth day.  
She always kept our refrigerator stocked with apple pie  
and eventually agreed with me that Billie Holiday isn't really jazz.  
We never went to a Grateful Dead show at Giants Stadium,  
certainly didn't get high in a women's bathroom stall and fuck on a broken toilet seat,  
but she had a beautiful tie-dyed summer dress that always made my stomach hurt.

There's a man who plays the saxophone in my subway station.  
He's usually there at night, when I'm returning from work,  
and I give him whatever change is in my pocket,  
sometimes a whole dollar if he's playing something I particularly like.  
He does this version of "God Bless America" that,

I'm ashamed to admit, always gives me goose bumps.  
Last night he was playing "Pennies from Heaven,"  
which my deceased wife used to sing in the shower,  
so I offered the man twenty dollars if he'd stop playing and have a drink with me.

We went to my apartment and chased bourbon shots with grape juice.  
I showed him pictures  
and told him how lonely I am,  
how much I hate God for stealing my wife away,  
how every time I see a couple holding hands,  
I wish death on at least one of them, sometimes both.  
I started to cry and asked him if he'd play "God Bless America."  
I took out another ten dollars from my wallet  
and laid it on the table.  
He smiled as he assembled his saxophone.  
"How old are you?" he asked.  
"Twenty-nine," I said.  
"You're young, you'll find someone else," he said. "You've got  
years and years to get over her,  
years and years more to fall hard for another woman."  
"Fitzgerald said that twenty-six is the acme of bachelorhood."  
"You tell your friend Fitzgerald to go fuck himself.  
I'm fifty-two and I have three different girlfriends."

