

The Widow

by Charles Semones

What was to be her life must have happened, she thinks, without her noticing, when she was cooking supper for her young husband, rocking heat-fretful babies, canning produce from her garden all those end-of-summer afternoons, or sitting hour after hour with her ailing mother, whose death crown she now keeps under glass in her closed-off parlor. She starts taking time apart and studying it in increments: months, years, decades. That's when she remembers those early birthdays—the chocolate cake, the brand-new half dollar under her upside-down plate when they called her to the table. The year she married, her husband picked wildflowers and held them behind his back when he came in from the field for dinner. *Just a little something*, he would have called them if she'd made a big to-do over wildflowers on her birthday. She knew how far he'd gone to pick them after topping tobacco all morning. Too soon he left her, just as middle age set in—the children grown and moved away. Ever since, she's had time on her hands for puttering around a house too large for her. But even now she cannot bring herself to leave it and move into a condo. Pink and yellow roses nodding on the backyard trellis stay in bloom for her until the fall's first killing frost each year. Sometimes as dusk falls, she tries to call to mind those other summers, but rarely does a remnant of a single day appear. Though she's been a widow almost half her life, she's never been unfaithful in either thought or deed. She visits his churchyard grave every Sunday after the service. Kneeling before his stone, she says his name over and over with her finger. It makes her happy. The only part of her life, she knows, that mattered to her happened when she was younger, all those summers ago.