

The Wish Rider by Barbara Casey

EXCERPT

At first Dara didn't turn out her light, preferring instead to study the wallpaper in the room where she was sleeping, between Carolina's room and Mackenzie's room. Just like the flowers in the vase next to her bed, flowers in colors of deep burgundy, yellow, and blue—jewel tones—floating on a background of ecru were displayed in large beautiful bouquets tied with lavender silk ribbons. She was reminded of the room she and the FIGs had shared when they stayed with Mother and Papa Granchelli. The wallpaper in that room had flowers, too—large, yellow cabbage-patch roses; and also, just like that room that had been chosen especially for them, the rooms they were staying in now had been chosen especially for them.

Her eyes drifted to the small table next to her bed and the things on it: the vase of flowers, a lamp that had two amber glass globes, a pretty ceramic dish, a small book of verse written by various women poets. She picked up the book and glanced at the names listed alphabetically: Bella Akhmadulina, Anna Bunina, Willa Cather, Emily Dickinson. Then, because it was what she did whenever she faced an especially challenging situation, she focused on words, or in this case, the family surnames of women poets, first establishing the root of each main word, or symbol in some instances, and assigning it a certain "weight" or number to determine its origin.

She was tired, having not slept in several nights. As she looked at the names in the small leather-bound book, placing the female poets' origins in countries such as France, Russia, and China, she realized that the reason she hadn't slept was because of something she had never been able to admit to anyone, not even to Mackenzie and Jennifer. Not even Carolina. Something she hadn't even been able to admit to herself because of the overwhelming guilt associated with it. But there in the beautiful room that had been picked out just for her, with the wallpaper covered in bouquets of flowers tied with silk ribbons, and at just that moment, she was somehow able to confront it at least in her thoughts.

She hated her mother.

For leaving her that day in the candy shop and not coming back. For not loving her daughter enough to keep her. Even though they didn't have much, it had been enough for Dara. Apparently it wasn't enough for her mother, though.

Dara had overcome so much: feelings of inadequacy, of failure, afraid of never being able to amount to anything. Of never being wanted by anyone. It was her genius with foreign and obscure languages that had sustained her through the years. It was also her genius that gave her permission to bury the feelings of hate for her mother so deep that they could never surface. But now, after all this time, facing the prospect of seeing the woman she had loved and called mama, that hatred had risen from the depths of her soul and resurfaced.

And she felt guilty.