

If you had been here, Lord

by [Mark Goad](#) in the [May 28, 2014](#) issue

Back a week from the grave. He pecks at the food
his sisters set before him. He is afraid to sleep. He imagines
the eyes of everyone upon him but they are careful not to stare,
a meaningless courtesy: the midday sun consumes both sight and soul.
His funeral shroud is unburnt—he won't allow it—but his sisters
refuse to permit its being brought into the house. Sometimes
they catch him holding it to his face and weeping into it. It smells
so foully that not even the crows will approach it. He rarely speaks
but sometimes talks of going away. It is almost, to their shame,
to be wished for.