

Calliope



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Calliope

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Manuscripts are discussed with the writer's name masked
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prejudice.

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Joyce Odam

DAY-END

I will be old when this is over.
My shawl will be thin;
it will barely cover me.

I will sit in a chair for hours
under the terrible distance of my memory
which is a spiral.

Everything that presses in will
find me narrow. I will not fit myself.
I will spread across the floor in shadow.

Joyce Odam

THE DREAM OF DEATH

The two girls lie down in the
center of the dream.
They are wearing white clothing.
They are transparent and
melting together like a
surrealistic drawing.

The watcher shrinks against dark
at the edges of the room
wanting to ask their names
wanting to talk to them
though they are in ecstasy
of transformation.

And there seems to be no door
only the boundless room
moving outward as the center grows
and the girls turn into
a formless shimmer on the floor.

And the watcher
dim-featured in the darkness now
is wary and frightened of them
though both of them are the watcher.

Beth Houston

STILL LIFE

Empty Boone's Farm
gallon jugs.
Bouquet of plastic chaos.
Frazzled tablecloth's
inkblot shadows.
Cracked bowl
of worm holes, bruises,
rotted cores.
Plate of moldy crusts.
Crumbs.
Chipped knifeblade.
Hunk of holey cheese,
fuzzy green;
mouse's head and tail.
Nail clippers.
Skeleton key.
One glove, inside out.
Old deck of cards.
Three precarious stacks
of coins.
Chicken bones.
Cockroach
giving birth.
Your face smeared
on the bottle, concave
side, upside-down.

Beth Houston

LATE NIGHT STREETSCENE

Where to go now?
awnings rolled up tight,
shopkeeper windows displayed
in dark corners of stockrooms,
caterings of restaurants
gone up in smoke,
every glass entryway gated.
Come-ons of bars drown
in last flushed toilets
in barred broken windows.
The damp dust church
prays you won't come near,
its steeple clock folded hands
pointing to the unknown.
Even the bus station's unclaimed
cargo offers no direction.
So I stare thru a fence
at the lush green park beyond,
tho what I see now is dark
as a crowbar on the skull.
Chainlink. Chains my sense
of direction to nowhere;
links one end
of that nowhere to another:
law of temptation
admitting only desire
clenched into brass knuckles.
I am lead melting
into a dark puddle of the night.
I want to be the moon
walking on water, playing
in the park, climbing fences,
over roofs, thru tops of trees,
carving a name everywhere;

Beth Houston/Late Night Streetscene

its blade in its teeth,
it creeps into corners,
scatters shadows like mice,
and without causing alarm, steals
in thru every store window,
and is never caught.

Jon Lavieri

STILL LIFE WITH SHARK

(for Baha Sadr)

Last night a storm
sharpened it's teeth on the sea wall,
spat out a fish
where Ocean Drive shoulders the curve.

This morning the sea
shattered into geysers on the rocks.
Driving through the spray
we swore it was a shark
belly up in the rearview mirror.

Turning back we found a sand shark
no more than my forearm,
out cold between our shoes.
The rusted kelp and road grit
speckling the pale underside.
The inert jaw, mute, closed upon nothing
but the milky, hacksaw teeth.
The body curved like a parenthetical enclosure
on a phrase uttered out of context
with no beggining or middle.

We got wet, laughing like fools
at something like a cheap bath toy,
at the thought of unzipping
this cartoon leviathan's wetsuit,
stepping back while a season of missing boats
sail out with their delirious crews.

We could have brought it home,
spinning a yarn of nets with our fingers
and drown it in a pond of garlic buttered wine.
But we left it behind

Jon Lavieri/Still Life with Shark

in it's aura of dead fish,
not having lowered our hands
close enough to hold that minor length of shark,
still fluid, swimming like a predator,
out of our grasp, off
into that cold ocean of sky.

Richard Chetwynd

MY FATHER'S PURCHASE

After a lifetime of living
out of boxes, in his fifties now,
my father purchased
some silence finally
with a house in it.

Two hundred dollars more
each month in debt
for three trees in the form
of silence—a plum, a peach
a crabapple. Standing
in the center just off
the back deck he hears
the wind jostle the leaves
of his three trees and thinks
he feels the vibrations
of neighbors' voices
falling short like arrows
out of range. Most of all
he hears himself, breath
gushing his one lung,
the strange humph
to change places.

He says he has his own
mailbox I take to mean
on a pole at the edge
of his silence, a place
he can walk to. He walks
mainly in circles, stays
clear of the corners
from instinct, wonders
why it took so long
to sink in—the grass
is quieter in one's own
backyard, no reason

Richard Chetwynd/My Father's Purchase

to link that sound with
what could be there,
what's left behind remains
a mystery, a form of silence
with my father in it.

Richard Chetwynd

OVERLOON

a museum/park honoring the Dutch resistance,
and others killed during World War II

This is where they went,
where the plump woman's kid had no time
for goodbye, goodbye
being neither appropriate
nor subtle enough,
and the women failed with their lives
protecting them. Walking through

you have to imagine
a manly boy, twenty, a schoolyard
scar on his forehead (imagine
it familiar) about to step
on a Roman artifact
or adjusting his belt,
always a pain in the ass
how his pants never stayed up
as if he lacked a vital bone
the belt could not correct
and the marching, swivel left
and right, undressed him,
and he stopped briefly,

forever on the battlefield.
This is where it happened
and walking through is easy
though it's November, colder
than usual. We pass a Sherman tank,
a heap of scrapmetal sinking
in the earth, new age slogans sprayed
along its flank, a crooked bull's-eye
painted around the black hole
we all approach and have always aimed for,

Richard Chetwynd/**Overloon**

knowing it or not. Inside
we creep past glass cases
like strangers downtown; neatly
pressed uniforms snug
on faceless mannequins,
steel pots, Axis and Allied,
dented by shrapnel, ripped open
when someone's head exploded.

This is where they went, faces
no one will live to remember, vanished
among the scattered debris of war:
crosses makeshift on the hill,
a blowup photo of a Jew
deep in the corner of the last room,
his brains in a bowl, two scientists
sipping coffee at his side.

Allison Joseph

DETAILS

From your window, I watch streets fill
with people breathing cold air,

dashing for the bus at the curb,
for the taxi pulling away.

You sleep, dark hair stark
against the pillow, hands caught

in twisted sheets we've roamed
together, our bodies never calm

in darkness. Here, every scent
is mine, every detail of this

washed-out room belongs to me—
the rasp of your snore, the clank

and hiss of the ancient radiators,
the red glare of alarm clock

numbers. I hoard it all,
crave the sound of muffled voices

through apartment walls, intent
to hear insistent footsteps,

lingering cries. Still, you sleep,
another detail for me to observe,

note, file away exactly, precisely.
Our tangled clothes dwell

Allison Joseph/Details

in the corner, unaware that my life
mixed with yours means potent

alchemy, risk. Within these walls,
our shelter gains strength untouched.

Absorbed now by only you,
the streets are a blank,

each person there a lonely cipher,
against whom I measure you.

Allison Joseph

THE LEAST COMMON DENOMINATOR

In long school hours we learned
about the least common denominator,

the one trick that would reduce
our numbers neatly to indivisibility,

that secure state I could not
attain, blustering with multiples,

long division. Instead, I'd stare
at the zero's empty eye, joggle

extra-credit points against
red marks of mistakes, my digits

strung out too far along
the number line, with x,

the unknown, coming out
both negative and positive,

each value in accord
with only itself. Now,

I pull together the edges
of my life, engage in

ambivalent words, not
absolute values. I don't

even trust the numbers
in my mail: account balances

Allison Joseph/The Least Common Denominator

and amounts due conspiring
to diminish my gains, reminding

that one tragedy, multiplied
by itself, is still one tragedy.

But our lives need another
kind of accounting—sufficient

to solve the geometry of loss,
to settle configurations

that happen without the comfort
of rulers or protractors,

the confidences we cannot
wish away, even as we know

that solving for the unknown
is impossible, the unknown

itself singularly human,
flawed as our arithmetic.

We need the legacy
of error, sums that do not

easily add up, totals of
rich and forthright memory.

Allison Joseph

CHURCHWOMEN

In the dark vestry,
we sell raffles and cupcakes,
hoard food for the hungry.

We sing, eyes full of solace,
hands taut in faith.

Tall, dark, shriven,
we shiver to sing, to grow
beyond our slender means—
kitchens, recipe cards.

Ponderous and slow,
we walk on soft soles,
dark as the dust of church corners
that untouched, webs and flourishes
as if spirited.

We are the timid of hometowns
you do not seek to remember:
the organist, the Sunday school teacher,
the benevolent woman of the nursery.

We sit, minds going still with age
that mutes our voices, our longings.
We fight to hear our selves resound
with mercy and pity, to hear our voices
in songs we can manage, our eyes losing
their possibilities, our speech of ash.

Ed Weyhing

CONDOLENCES

Tonight I'm on foot, till 2 a.m. I grew up in this neighborhood, walked this beat 18 years. I know my way around, know these people. Still, I'm surprised to see Lucille, less than twelve hours after the funeral. People are all over the street, young people, the women in high heels, men in bright shirts. Things are starting to get noisy: a car radio turned up loud, young guys calling across the intersection, the usual Saturday night. But Lucille's got the grandchildren with her, stepping off the curb outside the Handi Mart at the corner of 113th Street.

Me and Lucille are old friends, grew up together, in this neighborhood around Kennedy Square, which isn't a square at all, just the intersection of 114th and Central, one block up from here.

Right now people are everywhere, haven't settled into any bar for the night. Somebody's propped the door of The Green Parrot open with a cement block. Inside, a guy tests the microphone with loud talk. A woman laughs.

In the middle of it all, Lucille has a half gallon of milk in one hand, both the grandchildren holding her other hand. This morning she buried her youngest daughter. She's changed into shorts now, but still wears the same necklace she wore this morning. I can't think what to say.

I say to her, "It sure is humid tonight."

Two girls go by, smile at me. One calls out. "Hey, Perkins!" she says. I don't answer, don't pay attention to her.

I know these people, a lot of them since they were kids. Sometimes during the week I'm in the patrol car, covering the whole 18th and 19th wards. I was on Detectives three years, the last eight months of that Undercover. That was it for me. In and out of buildings, busting through doors and windows, never knew who was going to shoot at you, never knew who you might have to shoot, never knew if you were

*Ed Weyhing/*Condolences

accidentally going to waste some kid—some kid you saw grow up. Never knew if you might *have* to waste some kid. Now this thing with Lucille's daughter: dead when they found her, some house over on King Street. I didn't hear about it until I came on duty that afternoon. All I could think then was, *Thank God it didn't happen on my shift*. As if that made any difference.

This morning at the cemetery, women from the church minded these two grandchildren. There by the grave, right in the middle of the prayers, the women from the church had to keep whispering their names, "Tania! Ahmad!" trying to get them to stay put. Every five seconds it was "Tania! Ahmad!" trying to get them to be quiet, trying to get them to mind. Still, they were all over the place, dodging around the grey stones.

Lucille didn't seem to notice any of it, there by her daughter's grave, wrung out with crying. This daughter was her baby, just nineteen, already the mother of these two kids: Tania, four, Ahmad, two. Now Lucille has buried her daughter, has these two grandchildren to take care of. Tonight she's in shorts and sandals, still wearing that necklace, from church, thin silver flower petals on a chain.

Leaving the cemetery, I took the pastor aside, took two twenties, pressed them on him. I told the pastor it was best they come from him. I couldn't give the money to Lucille myself. I couldn't really face her then, couldn't talk to her. I just didn't know what to say to her.

Now I say to her, "This humidity sure has been something."

Across the street, in front of The Palms, a guy I brought in once acts like he doesn't see me, thinks maybe I don't recognize him. When this guy was 15, 16, we brought him in twenty times before he finally got locked up. Now he must be 18, back on the street.

This morning in the church, someone fastened white ribbons to the pews. Lucille, still a fine looking woman, black dress, high heels. In church she hugged these two

Ed Weyhing/Condolences

close. I want to get away from the funeral, but it's all I can think of. I say to her, "It sure was hot in that church" Her daughter was just nineteen, already mother of these two. They say Lucille got her into nurses' aide class at the community college, started last month.

But her daughter was on the street, sometimes late at night, not always with the right people. I never talked to her. I *thought* about talking to Lucille, then I thought, maybe it would turn out okay. What could I say: "I don't like your daughter's friends"? I didn't know what to say, whether to say anything.

Me and Lucille were kids together; I went to school with her man. We all three covered this territory together, all up and down Central. Sneaking into the subway, stealing fruit from the stands, down at the old haymarket.

It's not like that today, though. Today, with these kids, it's different. They're on the street, all hours. I see them. Seems like half the homicides I cover are kids, killing each other.

I try to think of something else, but I say to her, "It sure was hot in that church this morning." Lucille nods. She's changed out of her good clothes, still wearing the same necklace she wore in church. A silver necklace, silver flower petals on a chain.

She's quiet now. She has these two little ones. Her daughter named them Tanicia, Ahmad. And Lucille, at her age, starting all over. After watching Lucille's first three, how good they were, nobody imagined anything like this with one of *her* kids. Her boy's in the Navy, just back from the Gulf. Strong kid, like his daddy. Two other daughters, both on their own. But now she has these two grandchildren. She reaches down to straighten the little boy's Giants shirt, and that necklace makes a sound, those silver flower petals tinkling against each other. I don't know what to say, don't know if she's listening.

Ed Weyhing/Condolences

I say to her, "It sure has been some day." I don't know if she hears me or not. Both these little ones, Tanicia, Ahmad, pulling this way and that. Now here she is, starting over. Her daughter was only nineteen.

Her man: he was a strong kid. Me and him played baseball together at the 115th Street playground. He worked over at the bank, nights, cleaning. He was solid, finished high school, got drafted. That baby was two months old when Lucille got word about her husband. After she lost him, Lucille held on to that baby. Held on for nineteen years.

I tried to imagine if her man had lived. What would he look like? What would he be doing back here? Maybe on the force with me? He would know what to do with these two little ones, his grandchildren, Tanicia, Ahmad, pulling in every direction, one crying for gum, the other wanting a plastic ring for her finger. He would know what to say to Lucille.

I say to her, "It sure is something." Back then they flew me along to escort her man's body back. At the cemetery I was the one saluted, gave Lucille the flag. That time the women from the church had her three older ones to take care of. Her own behaved, of course. She held the baby herself. It slept through the pastor's prayers. I had to walk up to her then, right there by her husband's grave. I had the red beret just right, my boots spit shined. Lucille, nineteen years younger, wearing this same necklace, holding that baby. I said my part, saluted, gave her the flag. It was awkward: she had to put the baby on her shoulder to get a hand free to take the flag, and the baby woke up. I was embarrassed, didn't know what sense it made, waking the baby up for that. After the ceremony I didn't know what to say to Lucille. When her sister and brother-in-law came up to her, I got on out of there.

Nineteen years later, that baby was on the street, out late, not always with the right people. Was there anything I should have done? Was there anything I *could* have done? Even if I told Lucille, would it have made any difference?

Ed Weyhing/Condolences

This morning the two older daughters were there, with their own little ones. The son was there in his Navy blues: a strong kid, like his daddy. On leave from the *Saratoga*, just back from the Gulf. And then these two grandchildren, running all over, wouldn't sit still.

I never had kids, but I knew, watching my sister, watching Lucille. You have four, like Lucille. It looks like the first three are doing okay. They get good grades, finish school, get good jobs. Then, somewhere along the line, something happens. The fourth one, she starts spending more time away from home. Maybe you don't like some of the people stopping by for her. But you don't want to believe anything's wrong. People say you've babied her, held her back. You want to give her a chance, but before you know it, you've lost her.

Lucille's first three, they did okay. But her baby, her youngest daughter. Somewhere, something happened, she lost this youngest daughter. She held her back, then she lost her. I saw it happening, but was it my place to tell her? What could I say to her? Would it have made any difference? Now here she is, with these two grandchildren, this same necklace.

If this happened to my niece, to one of my nephews, I wouldn't know what to do. I don't know how I would stand it. I want to tell Lucille I know how she must feel. I want to tell her I wish I had done something. Instead I say to her, "That was a good crowd there this morning in that church." But I don't know if she hears me. The two little ones are pulling in different directions. One wants to go back in the Handy Mart. I don't know if Lucille hears me, standing there in her shorts and sandals, still wearing that necklace, starting all over with these two little ones.

So I take two quarters, take the littlest by the hand. I put one quarter in, hold the boy's hand under the metal spout, crank until it stops, and six, seven little square chewing gums—red, yellow, green, blue—pop out into the boy's hand, and he stares at me. With the other quarter I show the oldest

Ed Weyhing/Condolences

how to work the crane. I show her how to work the crane, get the ring she wants, and she thanks me, putting the ring on.

The littlest, Ahmad, he just stands there, holding the chewing gums, staring at me. So I take one of the chewing gums, throw it up in the air, catch it with my mouth. Even Lucille smiles at that, tugs the boy's hand. The boy stares at me. Lucille can't get the boy to say thanks, can't get him to say anything. Finally she thanks me herself.

But before I can answer, before I can say anything, before I can even think, she hugs the half gallon of milk closer, gets both the children by the hand again, starts across the street. Finally I think to step out in the intersection, put my hand up to freeze traffic. But they're already on the other side, Lucille helping the boy up the curb. Her granddaughter, Tanicia, stops for a second. She has the ring on, looking at it. She holds it out under the street light, turning her hand this way and that to see the sparkle.

Mary Jo Thomas

RESPONDING TO A FRIEND'S REQUEST TO MAKE SENSE OF HER HUSBAND'S DEATH FROM SALMONELLA POISONING

Try not to imagine them greater than they are.
Nothing we must enlarge eight-thousand times
Can be anything but grossly misunderstood.
No, I don't think God has come back,
Looking back at you through a microscope;
He has not taken the body of a microbe.
They live, I'm told, inside molecules of air,
So light they need neither wings nor feet,
Moving, as they do, randomly about.
Their rod-shaped bodies are geometric
(More like the perimeters of things
Than things themselves).
I wouldn't distort their lack of cunning—
Working a thousand years they could not follow
Each other's example, duplicate
A single successful day.
If you must think about them,
Acknowledge that they, too, are at the mercy
Of things they can not possible understand:
Gusts of wind, the lust of filthy meat,
Or the wrong choice
Snatched from the rack of many.

Mary Jo Thomas

GEOMETRY

As angular as a Greek monument
Erected in the name of some pale muse,
Miss Guise divides the universe today
Into three parts.
She is the goddess of surfaces and solids.
She rises in front of the class,
Spreads her hands, one above the other,
Above us, the eight-grade girls in the first row.
She is the source of terrible inspiration—
Two-thirds of everything now rests upon my shoulders.

Later she explains that truly staight lines exist,
But only on the surface of still water.

I now imagine drinking glasses
Resting on window sills,
And bird baths in backyards
All across America.
One might construct many straight lines:
Crowded, they begin to displace one another;
Each with an arrow at either end,
They are rising into the limitless clouds,
A frenzied and dangerous infinity.

All of this is possible, she has taught us,
If there are no unexpected apocalypses—
Such as birds or whispers or breezes.

William Virgil Davis

THE BONES MEETS THE BONES

Under cover of dark
the bones move between the trees,
step silently over twigs
and stones, walk on water in the long
moonlight.

No one would know they are there.

And then, from the other direction,
coming toward them as inevitably
as death, the bones
come striding, alert in the moonlight,
as clean as rain.

The bones meet the bones

in a small meadow.

They walk up to one another like old friends
fall on each other's shoulders
and weep so loudly
even the wind stops to listen.

Mimi White

IT'S SUMMER AND ABOUT TO RAIN

Mommy tells me
the sky is full of blue
angels. She says they fly
close together like
a pond,
and if they fly too low
night comes and covers
the roof of our house.

I don't believe her.
I know the sky
is only air,
that angels are
in movies and big
Bibles.

If angels were real
I'd see one.
I'd go right up to her
and touch
her see-through wings.
I'd look into her white
eyes and see
if she has a soul.
I'd ask if death
is real.

I'd ask if death
is sleep
like mommy says. I'd ask
politely, very quietly

Mimi White/It's Summer and About to Rain

to talk with daddy.
See if he needs anything.
See if he wants me to read
to him from my
fairy tales - the fat book
with the red cover.
I'd read about Hansel and Gretel,
the witch, the woods,
and the father
who gave them up
for lost.

Martha Carlson-Bradley

INUIT CHILD

Your mother newly dead,
you were set out on the ice, an act
meant to spare you pain,
guarantee survival of the group.
Understand now, if you can—
it wasn't lack of caring—
they placed you tenderly
among the older dead,
all of you wrapped in fur.
Unlike the others
disfigured by time, torn leather and bone,
at six months your small body
stayed whole—your skin today
gold parchment, empty sockets like eyes
dark and startled, lashes
stuck to the browbone:
you died awake. And watching.
Five hundred years later
the same face, the same last moment.

Jeff Hardin

AT THE REDLIGHT

for Mike

At the redlight my friend
is stopped very far
from the next vehicle,
a red truck. Another car
could fit easily
into that space.

I feel uncomfortable.
I think, why this far?
We're wasting time.
Shouldn't we be closer?

Always, I am the invader,
the explorer, wanting to squeeze out
those suspended molecules.

It may be that space ahead of us
is whole, it will, when we resume,
remain there ahead of us, transported.

And my friend with his patient foot
knows something: that simply following
is beautiful and enough, that an
emptiness, even this one,
always is a guide.

Lynne H. deCourcy

WALKING IN THE WOODS: LATE NOVEMBER

A close gray sky
swirls above us, stark
branches criss-crossing clouds
like the lines on our
own faces reflected
in a moving, smoky mirror. I
hear an old echo warning that
time cannot be trusted
to progress at an orderly rate.
We take

each other's hands for comfort
and say the earth is a hoop
urged faster by a stick, the way
our knickered fathers played.
How like them at their ends
we turned out to be, after all.
I remember how they were
afraid for us
now that I, too, have
those dreams of chasing
our daughters and sons,

desperate to warn them, to bracket
their faces with my hands again
while I try, just once more.

But they are gone
and will not hear
until the earth revolves them
around these canyons
of love and time
where our echoes
will reverberate longer
than we will live

Lynne H. deCourcy/Walking in the Woods...

In the mean-
time, we are alone with our shrinking
bodies, our sharpening bone lines like
the bare trunks of the trees
that fed the leaves all summer.
In the beginning it was you and I
as stark and simple as this
nakedness returning. Your heart
shines again like light through
Dresden flesh and I think
I finally know how to hold it,
gently enough.

Before we go in, I turn
to call a message to the children:
Gently! hold hearts gently!
It will linger in the air
until they ride the earth around.

Lynne H. deCourcy

ROCKLAND STATE HOSPITAL

A summer job between semesters: learn it
myself, then teach the patients
(*to express themselves*) copper tooling,
the hand sewing of leather,

embroidery's basic stitches (*chains,*
and the orderly turmoil of french knots)
and, at the clay table, how to coil
grey snakes into ascending circles

(*as though sleeping, they raised their impossible*
dreams of height,)

before firing pots they would glaze
with colors I called sunrise

or sunset, when they ran like wet
misery down pancake makeup.
Of course, the windows were barred,
as movies had led me to expect,

and any view of sunset
or dawning was striped with iron
unless a patient narrowed her eyes and
pressed her forehead to the glass

where it left a smudge of oil
as though she'd been anointed
and was leaving
that vague mark of her life.

But not many did; there was television
to watch in the dayroom,
a small black and white
from which Lucy and Desi shouted

Lynne H. deCourcy/Rockland State Hospital

and sang,
and June and Wally Cleaver reran
a family no one could have recognized
even if the room were not dense

with smoke and the stupor
of Thorazine. Perhaps you ask
what is the point of this story?
Well, that was a problem then,

as now, as I wonder why
I even remember the little that I do:
the fat psychiatrist whose oars
never reached the water,

and Ella,
sweet Ella who pressed a damp dollar
like a fern into my hand—
the allowance a kind niece had been sending

in a weekly letter for almost thirty years—
and begged me to get us each an ice cream
(*keep the change, dear, for your trouble*),
and the heat, the unbearable

heat of a kingdom uncome
that whole summer, melting
Ella's ice cream while I unlocked
and relocked the metal doors, carrying it

through airless corridors years
from the Good Humor man
while the tinny song of his truck
faded like *follow me away*

Lynne H. deCourcy/Rockland State Hospital

for anyone who could,
until what I dreaded:
vanilla and chocolate plopping off the stick
onto the floor in front of her

and the crying that finally wet Ella's cracked lips
with the hopelessness of her
hope, that failure, again
nothing what she ever thinks it will be.

That summer, to sleep at all
I soaked a towel in the coldest water
the naked sink in the corner
of my room would pipe

and spread it across my pillow.
*(You might think it was crazy, that pillow,
as sodden as if the tears of a life might never
dry, as if night after airless night*

*any woman might lie alone
on top of sheets just trying for the cool
dream of ice cream, the tinny song
in her mind repeating and repeating.)*

Michelle Dionetti

SKATERS

Something bobs along the kitchen ceiling, something enormous and yellow. I hesitate to step out onto the kitchen floor. The something is enormous and alive; a hovering, soundless bird, a flying eye, a fat, silly bee.

"Come in, come in!" they say.

They are all laughing. They often laugh at me. I would hate it if I didn't think I pleased them.

"What is it?" I ask.

I do not want to ask—I think I should know. Other people always seem to know about things I have to ask about. We none of us understand that my sight is poor, that I can see only indistinct shapes. The others think I am sweet, a dream child. But inside I am watchful, tense and cautious. No matter how I resolve to pay attention, to avoid surprises, surprises always happen.

Until I know what that yellow something is I cannot enter the kitchen. Whatever it is is waiting for me, I know that. Whatever it is dips slightly and drifts toward me in the friendliest of fashions. Is it a genie? My storybooks are full of genies, and giants and fairies. I think I see it drop something and I blink.

"It's a balloon, silly!" says my brother Edward. He shouts out his loudest laugh.

"A balloon?" I say.

"Uncle brought it."

Now I step into the kitchen, with some wonder. The balloons I know about start very small. First you pull them about to stretch their skins. Still it seems impossible to blow them up. I put the little bitter end into my mouth and blow hard. My cheeks puff up with air. I push air into the balloon, then I need to take another breath, then *blow* the air is back inside my mouth again. "PHAH!" I sigh, exhaling fast. Then another, bigger, puff of air and I try again, until spots dance in front of my eyes, yellow and white lights, and my

Michelle Dionetti/Skaters

mother takes the balloon away and gives it to my elder brother Frederick, who is ten. Frederick wipes the balloon's neck on his trousers, then blows it up for me with distant distaste.

My brother Edward can also blow up balloons, but rather than tie them off he lets them go in crazy, shrieking journeys around the kitchen. I can hear but not see these planets. I duck and hoot to cover my alarm and Edward laughs his loud laugh like a demand and my mother says, 'Here, Edward, give that to me. No, you can't have any more. I told you not to.' Always she says this. But flying blimps is the only way my brother Edward likes balloons, so he never stops sending missiles, even though he knows his first will be his last. Later, when I have learned not to show alarm, Mama merely tells Edward to take his balloons outside.

But today is my fifth birthday, so everyone watches me as I step into the kitchen and look up at the ceiling. The balloon's head is bent. It is looking down at me like a large egg-shaped grandfather, benign and approving.

"Hi," I say shyly, and they're off again, laughing, the entire family; Mama too.

Something brushes at my face. Carefully I put up my hand and discover that there really is something there; a string. I grasp at this and pull it away. With a rush the balloon comes down and bounces against my head.

"Oh!" I exclaim, startled, and my hand lets go of the string. Instantly the balloon bobs against the high ceiling, *bump, bump*, gallumphing and bowing like a silly old clown.

"It's tied to the string, stupid," says Edward against the laughter, and then my brother Frederick takes my hand. He finds the string for me again and puts the sting into my hand and says gently, "See, Emma, it will go with you wherever you go. Only don't let go of the string, okay? It will fly away, way way up into the sky, and disappear."

Michelle Dionetti/Skaters

"It will?" I grasp the string so hard I can barely feel it in the grip of my sweating fingers.

"Tie it to her wrist, Frederick," my father advises, and Frederick does so. There. Now the genie is secure, attached to my arm. I am the magician, the fairy godmother. I move my arm back and forth, conducting, and like a brass note the balloon obeys. I put both my arms out and wave and conduct, then whirl around. The string wraps around me, the balloon gets closer and closer to my face. Too tight, too tight. I begin to squirm.

My uncle gently turns me, counter clockwise, to unwind the string; once, twice, and again.

"There," he says.

He crouches in front of me. My mother calls my uncle 'Chip', a nice name that I assume is short for Chipmunk. I do not remember ever seeing him before. First he was away at war, then he had to stay in Germany. Now it is 1951, and he is home on leave. It is he who brought me my magical balloon. When he crouches in front of me I can see his green eyes and his comical, pleasant face. I love him already.

"Will it pop?" I ask him.

"Someday," he says. "Meanwhile, be careful not to get it too close to a tree branch or a hot thing."

"Or my knife!" shouts Edward, flying at me from across the room.

"No, no!" I shriek, and Uncle stands, lifting me up in his arms.

"I was only fooling," says Edward, his voice ripe with contempt.

"Leave it be," says my mother. "It is Emma's birthday."

My uncle smells like tobacco and also something sweet: It is his hair, which is shiny. I admire the way it waves over his ear. He is wearing a cap too, stiff light material. I sniff at his hair. Then I look up at my balloon. It is a balloon. I can see that now. The back of my neck hurts from tilting back so much.

Michelle Dionetti/Skaters

"Put me down," I say. It is hard to wave my arm for balloon-dancing without knocking into Uncle's cap.

At lunch time, when my grandfather and grandmother come in their pudgie green car, I take my balloon and Uncle Chip outside to show them. The grown-ups laugh and hug. Their chatter rustles like leaves over my head. I am only barely paying attention. The string is loosening on my wrist. I worry my hand out through the loop and somehow I let go. The balloon rises swiftly away from me. Instinctively I reach for the string I know is there, but I cannot find it. My shriek rents the air.

My uncle leaps up, his arm raised.

"Gotcha!" he cries.

"My balloon, my balloon," I sob, staring skyward at the globe of yellow.

"I've got it," says my uncle.

"You should not have let it go," reproves Frederick sternly.

"It's all right," says my uncle, crouching in front of me and tying the balloon once again firmly around my wrist. "We've got it back."

He smiles at me and I smile back, right through my tears.

"Emmie's balloon wouldn't leave her," teases my uncle. "She's too sweet, right? Right, Emmie-Sweet-Emmie?"

I begin to giggle. I throw my arms around my uncle's neck and when he stands he takes me with him. The balloon hovers above us, a flying benediction.

It is a Christmas of surprises, a surprising Christmas. I have received gifts I never thought of: I know they came from Santa's workshop. I have received a boy doll, with a little blue cap and jacket. I have received a hard plastic box with compartments inside full of wooden beads and lengths of thick colored string like shoelaces onto which I can string

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the beads for necklaces. Some of the beads are shaped like tulips. And I have a fluffy doggie that winds up, with a metal key on his side. Then he yaps and jumps. I carry all of these things around with me in my arms and I insist on wearing my Christmas corsage, a bouquet of white bells like sparkley stiff icing, edged with red glitter against a spray of shiny red foil leaves. The leaves poke sharply into my chin, my neck, but I don't care. The world is twilit. Magic has entered my home.

Then my uncle comes. I expect the air behind him to be alive with balloons, but it is not. Instead he brings bundles of worthless deutschemarks for the boys, who are to save them because someday, he says, the deutschemarks will be worth money again. To me he brings a music box, a square one with a clear plastic cover. Under the cover is a whole snowy world.

I take the cover off with trembling hands. The slopes of the peaky mountains at the back are white with crusty snow. Snow covers the roofs of the chalets at the foot of the mountains and the ground everywhere, except for the pond, which is a clear mirror. On the snow are some geese and a horse pulling a sleigh with two people in it. On the pond is one skater. My uncle puts a silver key into the hole at the side of the box.

"Wind it slowly," he tells me. "Be careful. Do not overwind. German clockwork. The best."

When he takes his hand away a tinkling *Blue Danube* sprinkles the air, and the single skater on the pond circles round and round.

"Wonderful!" cries Mama, and I think, *so am I*. I am full of wonder.

My uncle has brought Kristina with him. Kristina is German, like the music box. She has a smooth shiny face and her hair cut short in a way I have never seen a woman wear it, but I sense right away that Kristina's hair is special. When she speaks I have trouble understanding her, except for the *Ya?* with which she ends each sentence, and I

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love her too. Christmas has brought Uncle Chip and Kristina and the skater from Over Seas. Anything can happen; anything.

At night, before supper, we go skaking, my brothers, my uncle, Kristina and I. Darkness comes early at Christmas-time, 4:30. Edward and Frederick with their new skates and I with Edward's old ones lead the others behind the barn, across the orchard to the stone wall, over that to the pasture that slopes down to the edge of a thin wood. At the bottom of the pasture, before it meets the dirt road leading to the Kellys' farm, is a man-made irrigation ditch which we call The Pond. We all skate here in winter, the boys in skates that flash silver in seldom moonlight or weak sun, and I in my boots.

At the edge of the pond Kristina sits down next to me on the trunk of a dead elm. Mr. Kelly dragged the trunk here by tractor on purpose for sitting.

"Ve vill sit here, ya?" she says. "Da girls vill sit here. Our men vill tie our skates."

I look up at her round face. It shines itself like a star, as do her eyes. It is true that the few times I have had the use of skates before this evening my brother Frederick laced them up, but I always thought that was because I was little, not because I was a girl. Behind Kristina's head are swimming lights I know are stars.

I squint my eyes at the pond. It glances silver/white, like a fish's scales. The blue on the far side is snow. There is a smudge of black shadow denoting trees and then there is the sky, that winking starry bowl covering our town. Like Kristina I hold out my feet. Uncle Chip kneels on one knee to affix Kristina's white skate to her right foot, and Frederick wrestles Edward's old black one onto mine.

"Push. Emmie," he says impatiently, but I ignore him. I look beyond his hunched shoulders to the pond. I hear the rhythm of blades, *skra, skra*. I see a shape I know is Edward move fast and short, right left right left. Cold comes into my throat each time I breathe and I cannot feel the tips of my

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fingers in their thick wool mittens. *Phoo, phoo*. I watch cold white smoke come out of me. I am magic, a winter dragon.

When we are ready my uncle takes my left hand and Kristina my right. The three of us glide onto the ice. I look down toward my feet. My feet do not move, but they slide by magic across the rough white surface of the pond.

"Moof your legs!" urges Kristina. "Moof your feet! Ya, ya, ya, ya!"

Kristina turns so she is facing me. I feel her cool leather gloves grip my wrists. I start to giggle. Gently she turns me toward her.

"Skate to me!" she cries. "Come, come. Ve vill fly, you and I, ya! Flying Emma!"

I giggle. I bend over at the waist, like Kristina. I giggle harder.

"No, no! Up!" she cries.

She pulls up on my arms and I straighten.

"Ya! Now, *von*, two, *von*, two!"

Hesitantly I push one foot forward, then the next.

"Ya!" cries Kristina.

Edward hoots and skates in a circle around us.

"Now faster!" urges Kristina.

The Edward-blur makes me dizzy. I am afraid to look at Kristina's face because it is in shadow and I cannot see it. Stars wane and brighten behind her head. I close my eyes and concentrate on keeping time with Kristina's backward feet, one, two, one, two.

"Ya, ya, ya, ya!" cries Kristina.

All sensation is in my wrists, where she guides me, and my feet, which move now of their own volition.

"Goot!" cries Kristina. "Now ve fly!"

And she turns to my right as my uncle recaptures my left hand. I open my eyes. *Von*, two, *von*, two, we skate together across the pond. We fly. A snowbank comes up suddenly and then Kristina turns and so do I and then my uncle, and my brothers line up at my uncle's left hand and together we slide, we fly, into the night. The bells on Kristina's skates

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jingle. My laughter peals up too, and the boys' shouts, and we are the magic again, flying against the night.

Uncle Chip and Kristina leave after two days. I hug my boy doll and cry a little. Christmas is over. The fat fragrant tree drops the first of its dry needles onto the braided rug.

"... *believe* he'd bring her here!" says my father in the kitchen.

My mother's voice intercedes.

"... *German!* " rumbles my father.

Again the murmur of my mother's voice. I hear my father's ponderous footsteps across the scuffed wooden floor.

"He's on thin ice," says my father ominously, his exit line.

Oh dear. The pond must be thawing. Still, my uncle will know what to do and if not, Kristina will be there to teach him.

In the private magic that exists before dawn I wind my music box slowly, with great care, and lean my chin down on my hands until my eyes are level with the skater. I watch the skater go round and round. I swear it comes alive. The skater glides with a tiny tinkling sound across the smooth surface. I think I can see tiny etching lines, *skee, skee*. I feel the cold. From the skater's costume hang bells, tiny silver ones, which make a sound more fragile than the sound of thin ice cracking against the musicbox tune. The skater slows, slows. Each tinny note sounds once, reluctantly, with a dizzy pause before the next. The skater stops. The tune stops too. I reach for the key. I cannot bear it when the music stops.

One pre-dawn morning I decide to go skating. On the way to the pond I play a favorite game of mine. Rather than strain my sight in the blue morning dusk, I close my eyes and make my way by the memory picture in my mind. I have been to the pond so many times, it is easy to picture it as it is now. The air crackles with cold and a friendly silence. My feet make loud crunchy sounds. We are impatient, my feet and I. The orchard is the easy part—branches to guide

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by, and the vision-impaired's radar knowledge of a large obstruction blocking the flow of air. Soon will come the stone wall: Yes.

I put down my skates, pull off one mitten, and still with my eyes closed I feel the stones. Here is the rickety-rackety-rock. The stepping stones will be just nearby—yes, here.

Triumphantly I retrieve my skates, opening my eyes to make the finding of them quicker. It isn't really cheating—I have already found the stones. Dawn has cracked the edge of the horizon with a thin, wine-colored fissure. A crow calls its black passage over the open field, west, *CAW, Caw, caw*, a receding professional siren. I look off toward the sound of the call, then close my eyes again. I take a deep breath, pulling my memory-picture of the lower pasture up into my mind's eye: There. I try climbing the stepping stones up, then down the stone wall, with no hands. Oops.

The snow underfoot is thinner here where it melts soonest when the sun warms the stones. It is thicker around the random tufts of meadow grass, thin again near the crest of the pasture. My feet easily find the flat path the cows have beaten along the side of the slope. As I have before, I imagine that slaves from Egypt wore the path smooth by hauling stones up the hill from the pond to make the orchard walls. So vivid is the picture in my mind that I see a dark-skinned slave in a white loincloth coming up the path. He is clutching a rope over his shoulder. His shoulder bleeds from the weight of the stone he pulls upward.

My eyes fly open: Nothing. As so often happens with me I am astonished when the people from my imagination do not actually join me in the sighted world. I stand still a minute, blinking, but all I can see is a world with more transparency to its waking landscape and an empty path. I cannot believe my eyes, and I am not convinced. I push to the side of the hill, giving the invisible Egyptian time to pass. *Good morning*, I greet him politely in my head. There. Now. I look down the hill at the frozen pond and break into a smile. The game is over. Time to run.

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When I reach the edge of the pond I sit on the tree trunk and unzip one red rubber boot with difficulty. My fingers are almost numb. I look at the skates. *Maybe not*, I think. *Maybe tomorrow*. This morning I will skate as I usually do, on the soles of my boots.

I run halfway back up the hill. The sky is unfolding quickly—mauve, rose, gold, yellow. Birds twitter. I can hear Farmer Kelly's truck cough into action. Soon my family will wake up.

I face the pond, take a running start, and hurtle onto the ice. My first morning call, "Hi-Yi-Yi!" carols across the flat of morning. The ice cracks a little, then a small symphony of crackles follows and stops. I stand still, listening, my head turned up to the sky which is streaking pink. It will be a day fitful with streams of fibrous clouds, a disappearing sun. A little scatter of black specks flies into view; birds. I follow their flight across the sky, the silent flap, the soaring.

"Em-ma!" calls a voice.

Edward. I look quickly up the slope toward the orchard. He is still not visible. If I reach the middle of the pond before Edward comes I will win. I turn and begin to boot-skate toward the center.

"Em-ma! Thin ice!"

What?

"THIN ICE! COME BACK!"

The ice is a good slide because there is an invisible skin of water across the top. The ice is darker farther out.

Edward's words finally break into my consciousness. Oh, thin ice! The ominous crackle begins again, and one loud sudden snap, as I turn toward the growing moving spectre that is Edward.

I try to send lightening to my feet, try to boot-skate with the speed I always imagine with my eyes closed. I try to be the Fastest Girl Ever to Skate the Pond. Fear grows upward, to my heart. I feel my face crack too. I am about to cry.

"Emma!"

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Edward scrambles down the face of the hill.

"Edward!" I scream. One heel breaks through.

"Edward!"

I reach the edge of the pond and Edward's hands. He steps right in to grab me as I sink up to my knees.

"It's cold!" I shout, outraged. My boots are wells of water.

"You stupid idiot!" yells Edward, but there is relief in his voice and his hands will not let go. "You *stupid*!"

He hauls me onto shore. For a moment we watch the water pool silently over the broken ice, watch it pool in dark gray patches. Edward's teeth are chattering. I am so ashamed. I begin to cry.

"I can't feel my feet!" I wail, hoping pity will distract him from his rightful anger.

"I'll get Mama!" says Edward. "Don't move! I'll get Papa!"

And he is off, bellowing, "Mama, Papa! Emmie fell in!" shrilly into the air.

Morning is open now, full white. Having dawned, the sun rolls back behind the quilted sky for another forty winks. I fell in. I am overcome by a pleasurable shudder of fear and importance. I lie piteously on the snow and wait to be fussed over.

The pond is ringed with dandelions and full of tadpoles when my uncle's plane falls from the sky. I do not understand. I do not comprehend at all that this means the end of my uncle. Edward takes his tin helicopter and drops it on the floor again and again.

"NEEeaaaaOw-BOOSH!" he says. "NEeaaaaaw-POOMPH!" until Frederick first tells him to be quiet and then punches him. Edward punches back and they both wrestle and end up crying.

My mother cries too. She comes in to scold and separate them but then she kneels down to give each of them a sharp hug.

Michelle Dionetti / **Skaters**

"What's wrong, Mama?" I ask.

I sense rather than see her tears. When I get near enough to her a whiff of dampness wafts from her face. I touch my palm to her cheek experimentally. Yes; wet.

Mama catches my hand and pulls it down, then draws me to her. She hugs me against her dress front.

"Uncle Chip had an accident while flying," she says, "and now he is in heaven."

Ah. This I understand. Like one of Edward's balloons he got to spinning around in a wild and frenzied play and he burst into heaven by mistake. How excited he must have been! Or no; maybe he just floated quietly up and up, like my helium balloon. I find this easy to see in my imagination. I nod my head against my mother's warm side.

"That's okay, Mama," I comfort.

My mother makes a funny little sound and lets me go. I go out the back door into summer. Crickets call in the long grasses and the sun falls warm on my arm, my shoulder, my face when I lift it up. Out in the orchard green apples are beginning, and down in the pasture Farmer Kelly's cows graze near the pond.

I try to look up at the sky, but as always I have to shut my eyes. It is too bright to see. In my mind's eye I can see *him* though, his plane a yellow blur, rising and rising and rising through the thin blue sky to the stars.

Marcelle M. Soviero

HATCHED

If you opened me,
you would find skulls, not rainbows.
You might expect tulips,
daisies. But nothing so pretty
grows. Instead there are vines
and rows of dead corn stalks.
My organs are dusty as unread books,
each artery is black. You could carve your name
in my stomach's wall, and I will not flinch.
You will not find white fences, or cobblestones,
and the honeycombs have no honey.
Forgive me, you had hoped for more, I know.
You with your thick heart,
I say this only to show what over-loving
the outside will do.

Marcelle M. Soviero

THE BODY THAT WANTS

This is the body that wants to remember
its own birth, the new skin pushed through
a tunnel of muscle, the eye's webs broken
by the first shock of light,
the last touch to the sticky temples and neck,
the slow accumulation of breath
as small as thimbles.

This is the body that wants to be blessed
by the earth, to know that my strength comes from
the mis-shaped stones stacked in my bones
and that I have everything to do
with the bird's song, each note caught and released
from the throat one stitch at a time.

This is the body that wants to remember
my father's hands carrying me up to the room
of crowns and roses, my small body flanneled
and warm as alphabet soup,
tucked in bed, sheets-to-chin.
The yellow bedposts stand erect
behind my father's back as he tells the story
of the angel and the bear with pictures
spread across both pages, colors blending
with his fingers and voice.

This is the body that wants to remember
the first desire; the body's cavity opening, turning thick as
bread,
swapping a lover's blood for my own,
the flesh like a fire burning in one spot,
the tender ache in the stomach growing wings,
each nerve unravelling
ready to know everything at once.

Marcelle M. Soviero/The Body that Wants

This is the body that wants to forgive
where I was loved wrongly,
where the skin was split like the apple
chewed and left to its skull, the definition
of touch changing from soft to hard
like the muscles in the abdomen stiffening,
or the alien force pressed into my backbone,
shoulder blades splitting like logs,
my slow drowning in oil.

This is the body that wants to be sure
of my hips too big, curved like a half-moon
but noticeable in their roundness,
and my stomach swelled like a seeded fruit,
its juice sweet enough to sip,
sure of each vertebrae laced down my spine
like shells strung on a windchime,
sure that the cross-section of veins
gathered like stitches
just under my breast,
mark life.

Marcelle M. Soviero

WHAT MEMORY BRINGS

Though it was not you in the station,
he looked enough like you
that my wrists burn again, and I can
smell your cologned neckbone
in the exhaust of the city's heat.
I like to think you never sleep,
that you can't without me tucked
like a rosebud under your armpit.
That you've gone absolutely mad
remembering how you cracked
my shell. Those cracks still grow
like the slit in the windshield
that spreads with the miles,
demanding it's replacement.
But who will replace me?
My love it was you
who did not flinch
when you stuck yourself
with the needles
as if to touch the season's first frost,
grabbed your grey skin,
the color of a winter sky,
the way you grabbed me.
You who spoke without a scratch in your voice
of your baby cousin burning in the fire
like a marshmallow on the coals.
Only you could watch
your mother's tumor grow,
without a word,
the cancer collecting in her stomach
like sand at the base of the hourglass.
Bastard, she called you,
but how was I to know?

Francine Witte

MOTHER-IN-LAW

We never met. I knew you only
from his voice hunching up
with your name. His first loss.
Each autumn, on the anniversary,
he'd light a thick candle, let it burn
into another year you wouldn't have.
I once saw him sob for a woman
on TV whose cancer, like yours, wouldn't heal.
When we visited the school where you taught,
I watched as he stood and stood by a tree
with your name. By now, you know

he's remarried. Children and all.
On nights like this, just past summer,
air crisp as apple-skin, you and I
almost meet. There we are in a swirl
You, with your dress the color of wrong
sunlight that funerals sometimes have, and me
tinged with a shade of faint regret
the once-loved sometimes wear.
The two of us transparent, real
as breath, our hands about to touch.

Francine Witte

X

means isn't, or anyway, not anymore,
and if you ever hope to be
again, you should be standing *here*
where another train's headed your way,

and, of course, it means ten,
or any unknown you can multiply
by anything else, but do it soon;
the alphabet's almost over.

X means there's been a mistake,
you used the wrong brand
which means you can't spell your name
or maybe you don't have one,
or you saw a movie you shouldn't
cross your heart and hope to die.

Kevin B. Diehr

THANKSGIVING DAY, 1990

My wilted grandmother,
liver-spotted left-hand leaning heavily
on a walker, fights gravity,
and turns to face us,
her family.
We offer false smiles of encouragement.

She babbles, says something
no one understands, except
the tired old man with the speckled beard,
who repeats her,
turning her statement to a question,
waiting for a muted reply.

Behind her
is a steel chair with enormous wheels.
He stretches around her, looking like a tailor
who measures a young girl's waist
for a new spring dress.

He sets the brake,
places his forearms around her back,
leans forward with his legs straddling
the padded foot-rests,
and holds her limp body above the chair.
His sweater pulls up his back,
exposing gray flesh as he struggles with the weight,
dropping her.

Kevin B. Diehr/Thanksgiving Day, 1990

She hits the chair too fast
too hard
the routiness of it shocks us,
how he looks as he straightens himself
after letting her down.

I remember my mother,
her staring,
how our eyes met.
We touched the distance
mother and child.

We turned away,
toward the open window,
pretending there was a view.

Kevin B. Diehr

SIMPLY GONE

Age five
watching my father
dig a hole
in the back yard
I am in my tree fort
surrounded by oak
seeing for the first time
the top of father's head
the way his hair is combed
sideways
to hide his balding
the secret curve of his shoulders
as he digs with mother's garden spade

Watching him dig
I make a tiny cross
two sticks bound together
with string from the knitting box

He buries a tan shoe box
Buster Brown
burned into the top
in dark brown letters

Inside is my gerbil
wrapped in tissue and cotton
I ask my father where it will go
he tells me it is simply gone

In three days
so is my father

I am left sitting in the tree
looking at a mound of dirt

Kevin B. Diehr/Simply Gone

fighting for space
in the overgrown lawn

Next to the mound
is the hand-made cross
Later I pull it free
to hide in the sock drawer
it is all I have left
to mark the passing

Nicole Greaves

HEROES

In my lover's attic the windows are blue,
colored glass that brings instant memory
of childhood and pocket knives
I traded for metal soldiers
to bury in the backyard,
in the arching hilltops of Gettysburg.

The troops are still there
I imagine, sinking deeper
in their tombs, armed and wide-eyed
unable to scratch free.
I had long since forgotten
their graveyards, and crosses
I laid upon the bruised earth,
in hopes that they would go to heaven,
float out of army fatigue
to inherit softer wings.

The glass in this attic is darker blue,
unlike mother's kitchen window
where I sat, strategically
plotting new burial ground;
under the porch, in the cellar,
in the garden patches.
Each day was a silent ritual,
a memorial, a service, for my dead boys
without mothers or children to mourn
for them,
without names.

The night looks thicker here
in my lover's attic,
stars like oysters
sink into a sea of blue

Nicole Greaves/Heroes

like my soldiers into soil
and I breath for them this air,
grasping, and catching in the stillness.
Out of guilt I give them names,
attach them to stars,
and talk to them like I never could.
at age nine, wanting them to die,
restless and trapped,
in matchbook boxes.

Matthew Murrey

WE JIGSAW

again
such patience this
search for shape
color or line to match.
Hour to hour
you and I fit
our words together
as one of us holds a piece
above the incomplete
like a archeologist
holding a shard
to fit a shattered pot
or as one of us sifts
the box of pieces
like a child rummaging
through questions.
There is no reward
beyond the time spent
(some say squandered)
beyond what emerges
beyond the pleasure mutual
of angle to edge
extention to indentation
lip to lip smooth
and beginning again always
again

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