

You were

You were the gentler of the two, the light touch,
the dimming sky, the softer voice
in the chorus of all the voices.

You were the shade under the tree,
the milder weather, the sleeping lion,
the lighter rain.

He was the lightning across the field,
the sun, the volcano, the red carnation,
the loud voice, the long prayer,
the organ in the sanctuary.

But it took both of you to make us—
one, two, three—different as minerals, yes that
different. Different as colors.
Different as animals in a jungle.
Different as countries with different flags.
Different as costumes, as cultures, as songs.

We are lost without you, travelers now,
flying careless across the land
until the knowing strikes us
like lightning out of the dazzling blue
that in our absence our house
has burned to the ground.

The rooms where you slept are silent now.
The curtains are stillness itself in the windows.
Your empty shoes
on the breezeway by the watering can
still sing the song of you who have left us.

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Your hats are all on hooks, your sweaters
folded in soft stacks in the closet. We touch
your shirts, one by one,
in the darkness of the mirrored closet.
We touch my father's ties,
ribbonlike in a different cedar-scented darkness.

The White Plate

The only thing of value is a white plate.
It doesn't look precious, and I don't remember it,
propped against the wall in the dining room
near the fireplace into which my aunt hurled plastic fruit

one snowy New Year's Eve, not far from the portrait
of young Lavinia Holt, who died as a child,
indicated by a flower held in her pale left hand,
a sadness. And then, the white plate, as the

world goes tilted, the very sky askew—
how did it not shatter, this Zen-plain treasure,
unlikely as a mid-day moon, with these two deaths,
so soon upon one another?

How? Like two stars...a flicker...another...then gone.
Father. Mother.
We didn't even catch our breaths,
scarcely a fortnight in between.

Sitting together on the lawn, near the old hammock,
ropes gray with mold and age, the trellis buzzing still
with bees—morning glory, honeysuckle, forsythia, all of it—
on the green grass in latticed chairs, they're sipping tea and eating toast,
they were always eating toast.

The nurses are packing the medical supplies—returning
this home to a younger, healthier version of itself,
more like the one we remember, when this god
and goddess stood glistening with pool water in the sun,

in bathing suits and striped towels, summer slate hot
beneath their soles. Farewell, and farewell again,
you two. We will probably sell the plate,
as it says nothing, nothing, of the richness.

Possible

Innocent, the river and the geese that graze
by the river. Innocent the bridge and
what it's made of. Innocent the students
who walk over the bridge bearing books and paper.
Innocent my heart, though it doesn't feel
innocent, with its uncomfortable onionskin layers,
a thousand striations of memories, bruises, contusions.

I would drive my own car back then,
eyes open, and keen—both hands on the wheel
at nine and three, the way my father taught me—
speeding (usually) towards the unrequited
and its shimmering, silver sheen,
turning left then left again to follow
what glitters, untouchable, untouched, just there—

there, where the trees end and the sky begins,
can you see?

I learned my lesson, eventually.
Still, I feel sometimes like a shiny bald pawn,
pushed around this checkered landscape by an unseen hand,
especially yesterday while pushing my white-blond boys
in a double stroller from MIT
up the path that lines the Charles, in the rain, my husband in a rage
running away towards Watertown, and not for the first time,

or the last. But that was years ago,
which is what I am talking about: striations.
Layers and layers, I am saying.
I am not guilty of doing much more than wanting more days now.
Like brick or geese
or water flowing east to the bay, why would I
hate myself more than these things?

I gather it all up like an armful of warm laundry,
meaning, myself I gather up,
along with my past and my endless thinking

about the past, along with my not thinking about anything.
Innocence, like the weather here, seeps into my bones,
slowly, the way it has for you. It feels like singing,
only in reverse. If such a thing were possible.