

Jodi Johnson

*Winner of the 1982-83
Sherwood Prize for Poetry*

A Mother's Death

When mother was sick she sent
Morgan and Jason and me
Outside to roll down hills,
Catching hay-colored grass and purple flowers in our hair,
So that at five years cancer
Seemed something made of sky and hot yellow splinters of sun.

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I picked sweet-peas for mother,
Purple/pink flowers in a glass by her bed.
But she didn't see—eyes closed, she sang,
Her voice dropping like petals in the room.

It was a year before I knew she was dead,
(Knowing was a dark sour taste on the roof of my heart.)
I only thought she was gone
And perhaps walking suddenly into her room one morning
I would catch her there, smelling of sweet peas, singing.

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I think that if I could
I would reach both arms around the waist of the world
And squeeze it flat as a sky,
To make the dead sprout up.

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