

Mary Harris

Snowfall in Southern California

So cold it snowed in the San Fernando Valley
when I was too young to go to school,
too sick to go outdoors. My mother
dashed outside with a muffin tin
to catch snowflakes to show
my brother and me. Through
the window, Tommy and I watched her,
stocky as a snowman but transformed
from matron into that spirited girl
we never knew who grew up in Iowa
where snow fell every winter,
deep enough to block the door.

Thirty-odd years later, it snowed again.
Like a figure in a snow scene paperweight,
I stood amid flurries of flakes and remembered
my mother romping on the lawn, pictured
her grave like a sheet cake frosted with icing.
Because she shared rare beauty with me,
snow touches me more now.
For the first time since her death,
I felt the glacier of grief within me
thaw as the cold front moved on.

What She Kept

My mother never put much stock in things,
collected pennies in a Waterford vase
beside her jewelry box, disappointing
young daughters rifling its contents,
tangled rosaries and baby bracelets.
We were her treasure, she said, buffing
us with hands like silvercloth.

A decent interval, we cleared her room,
the forlorn assortment she left, new
hat worn once to see the Pope, defeated
shoes old ladies wear. Our yellowing
First Communion dresses huddled on hangers
round-shouldered as schoolgirls, starched
organza choked with dust. None of us
kept her faith intact, but we salvaged
the dresses from charity, resigned
them to the closet's dark interior
and sealed the door.

Living Near a Fault Line

That desperate month
earth quaked in Los Angeles

the stock market bottomed out
and my mother dropped dead

heart attack. Back at work
in the newsroom, I rallied

with editors and reporters
around a TV monitor

as rescuers extracted a child
from a well in Texas.

This is the story we write daily
the depths we go

to bury love
or retrieve it.