

Patti Scheibel

Building A Family Tree

Halfway to the sky I bury myself under covers
in my grandma's old too-tall bed,
face even with the window, the incandescent clouds.
This bed used to have portable steps
but they got lost through the years,
cast into family black holes of moving and death.
The bed itself is all that's left of a woman
I never knew, who I can't pry loose
from the far reaches of my mother's mind:
did grandma tell awful jokes, did she prefer
morning or night . . . do I have her eyes?

Family histories worn down into a few grooves,
she said, says, "After grandma died
grandpa remarried and she willed all
but this bed to her own side
of the family, even the photographs."
Maggy, new bride for an old man,
a gap I fill in, he filled in
with the cold need of a man
in a dirty house with no dinner,
had you no pity on the old man's daughter?
I speak often to the dead, expecting an answer,

This bed holds me up,
Grandma's body touched it, she dreamed here,
scratches in the headboard, dark riches of wood
so beautiful and well made.
She must have wanted to give my mother
so much more than this.
I study my mother in case anyone asks,
her words, the color of her eyes.
I don't want the only thing left of her
to be mute furniture and desire.
Curling into this bed, into grandma's formless self,
I wander through unreal landscapes.
Solid wood stretches around me, mine now,
pushing my weightless self up through
a cloudy night to grandma moon.