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Two Poems

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REST HOME, KEARNEY, NEBRASKA

The ash from one hair, a thought,
blows down the hall. Each woman
is asleep, the tip of a needle
drinking from a black vein. They grow
full with the night. The place is overcrowded.
A dog-eared Reader's Digest on the table
says death is like a star
expanding in its own waning light.

Yet look at them, some having come farther
than others, all a long way
to die here. The sterile great-grandfathers
open their mouths like parachutes.
The words, all His names
keep them from falling, keep the paraquet
from rising like outstanding growth
around them. A man by his grandmother
unfolds her native flag. She touches the stars.
She wishes she were a star!

The well-lit corridor has all the women,
but not the hands or teeth
to keep them from dreaming, or those awake
from prayer to blue icons,
blue Mary, and to the stars
behind Her in the trees before moonbreak—

How the stars must alight in the deer's eyes,
bent over the salt lick
steaming deep in the wind-blown woods,
far into night. Tomorrow,
when the deer returns, it will not find the lick,
a sliver sunken through grass, its light
falling through the dirt. If tomorrow were kind,
it would never come. Outside, the mason
is done for the day, and leaves
the walls to repair themselves nightly.

CONOCO STATION AND HOUSE

Outside, under the window each day he sits
in a folding wooden chair, the driveway
dust probably settled for the evening,
his wife leaning out the window as though
she meant to look out over what he sees,
to will, finally, a car down the road.
The trees across the road fall nearly still
to leave reflections not quite undisturbed
in blue eyes that seem not to move at all,
her calico dress waving like the grass
that waves with the slight wind, how he expects
the wind. His hands deep inside themselves, cupped
on each knee, he knows without looking up
she calls without turning from where she watches.