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Homecoming

Jasper Vanspoore

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She came from the east.
Morning sun,
hot summer sap,
dripped over her shoulders,
down a long dark braid
trailling behind her feet.
The warmth of auburn hair woven
thin, winding lines into
soft, wet earth.
Her fingertips trailed across the sky,
pricked swollen clouds,
and rain fell.

The rivers followed her westward.

A place appeared,
five waters coalescing into one.
and she stopped,
heavy bellied and sway backed.
and she lay,
knees bent and neck arched
and the midwives came.

One from the south:

she came with red stones etched into her sides, resin burned in her palm.
hot wind billowed, swirling flaxen hair
tangled shards of lightning searing canyons of
ochre     serpentine    and granite.
She followed them up.

One from the north:

she came with snowmelt streaming over her hips,
sparrow-red cedar woven with raven blue hair
carried pillows of emerald bedding,
her soft footsteps mirrored by stardust
leading her way.

The midwives came
and the eastern woman labored.
Water broke
flooding
until a deep well formed
and silty murk turned to grass,
soft autumn hazy golden.
The skies quieted.

Children came,
tiny fists clutching camas   bitterroot
balsam      cous.
Limbs of larch and pine.
And through the valleys scattered

thousands of years
later
we came in the afterbirth,
my grandmother, my mother
myself.

It is fall and
after many years
I have just come home,
nested at the bend of her knee
where pine trees tumble off into piles at her feet.
I see the midwives still, broad and proud like she is:
the mountain in the south, and the mountain in the north.
the river still flows.
Today it was colored with clay.
HOMECOMING
Jasper Vanspoore

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hot summer sap,  
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ROSES FOR AMELIA
Libby Riddle

The first time I walked past your little garden, it was spring. Your street is a little out of my way, but the blooms caught my eye from the corner of Main Street and Magnolia. Amelia loves flowers so I knew she would want me to go and see them. I turned on Magnolia and ambled toward your house. The roses were practically bursting from the box beneath your window. Yellow, pink, and blue petals like tiny starbursts before my eyes. I had never seen blue roses before. I loved them immediately, and I knew she would, too. But the roses were not mine, so I hesitated. You had plenty of them, but they were so perfect that it seemed a great crime to deprive you of a single one. I also knew that the blue ones were the same color as Amelia’s eyes. I realized then that I couldn’t leave without one.

I’ve stolen one rose from you every week for the past six months. I’m sorry; I didn’t mean for it to become a pattern. But you always seemed to replace the one I took and then some by the time I returned the next week. Even when spring turned to summer and summer to fall, there were blue roses in your box. You must be a truly excellent gardener.

You nearly caught me one day in June. It was Amelia’s birthday. I had taken nearly five roses—too many, I know—but they were especially vibrant that week. As I plucked the fifth rose from the dirt, I saw you approaching the very same corner from where I had first glimpsed the flowers. I ran from your garden in shame before you turned onto Magnolia. I never took more than one rose after that week.

Until today. I was lost in thought when I turned onto Magnolia. A man on the corner with an acoustic guitar had been playing Amelia’s favorite song, and I was caught up with whistling the melody. I didn’t notice you watching from your front window until I was already stepping into your yard.

I froze with one foot on the sidewalk and one placed irrevocably on your grass.

Your figure disappeared from the window and my stomach filled with dread. I was afraid you would yell at me or call the police. You would