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BARBARA MOORE

CHILD SETTING THE TABLE FOR BREAKFAST

It was before morning, before anyone was up,
a raw wing brushed him, the child
setting foot in the cave of pantry,
a light-cord hovering just out of reach,
a stool shaking under him like a trestle
as he climbed, dragged the plates down
one by one, odd and bitter
in their embattled porcelain.
He was setting the table for his mother
still dreaming under folds of moony linen—
how could she know what it was like?
He had promised, he could not move.
Where was voice, bird?
The clock had no face, outdoors
trees leaned on each other
in a night sweat too thick to dislodge.
He saw how it was—
no guarantee the world would turn
on its big hinge frosted with terror—
space beyond space where the sun might be falling
even now, in the wrong direction.
He whimpered like a lonely animal
smelling the death of the planet,
nuzzled the window pane beside him, breathing,
breathing until a clear patch widened:
from the spark of himself, rubbed life,
enough to climb down from the stool, take
knives and forks from the depths of a cabinet,
lay them on the stunned table.
Just as a grey lip parted over the lawn,
he went to the foot of the stairs and called her.