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Joining the Mourners

Jeanne Mahon

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Joining the Mourners

Seven year olds don't die
shooting marbles. I knuckle down,
release, a cat's eye breaks the circle.
Mother calls me from the porch.
I don't want to stop my game.
She calls and calls my name.

Grandpa speaks of cave-ins, rockslides,
how death flies guided by the name
of the man it calls. How his number
never came up in the mine. How once he
carried a friend up the shaft
not knowing the extra weight was death.

*Funeral home, funeral home...the words
tumble in my sleep: a silo, cave,
or tunnel. I see you, my father, sitting
at the end of the shaft. The miners'
lighted caps bounce up and down.
Their lights shoot toward you, yet each
to each is dark, separate as stars.
Your goodbyes echo off the wet rocks,
somersault over the crossties of tracks.
Still seated you rise through
a rabbit hole. The miners clap and wave.*

I find you in the coffin not
seated or waving
but stopped, cut off, flat on your back.
When you worked midnight and slept days,
Mom would shut the bedroom door
keeping out my calls to *hide and seek*,
the ring of jacks on the kitchen floor.

Mother's silence looms taller in black.
She asks only my silence, that I not count
the yellow roses spread against
the satin lid. She bends once to ask
that I kiss you goodbye. I refuse.

The mourners sit and talk.
The babas count beads. I count
the marbles in my pocket. No one rises
to kiss your face.

II.

Father, I carried you heavy
as lodestone through half a life.
I accept my refusal to kiss your death.
I drag your carcass home now the way the hunter
struggles the dead deer
to the main road. You are
my food this winter, my store
against the days of shorter light.
I toss your bones like jacks
against the dark.

I see your face now, rubbed
marble small.
What remains swirls like a glassy. It is
as opaque as rock
struck from the heart of the moon.
I keep nothing of you, my father, except
one knucklebone for luck.

— *Jeanne Mahon*