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Marja Glaudi

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Marja Glaudi

Would wind her hair to a braided basket
back-of-her-neck; could
twist the neck of a goose in a second
and singe it and cook it quick-quick.

She had an amber hatpin
and a tarnished silver spoon
from the Old Country, Poland or Lithuania--
the border kept going back and forth
and she lost track,
but in 1967 on the green porch,
peeling and peeling the filmy silver dollar plant leaves
late afternoons,
the Russians,
she said,
were burning the farms. *Look!*
And pointed toward the picket fence
around the back garden. I looked.

Poppies, late roses; mossy bricks.
We kept telling her: *Don't worry.*
But she hid her butcher knife
in her deepest dresser drawer.

It wasn't a bad time, living there.
I loved my great-grandmother's silver hair
let down for drying: it streamed and glowed!
Tinsel! Willow fronds in rain--
"Delicious!" I cried out--*rozkoszny*--
combing and combing.

Old princess old doll old sorceress.
She was lovely and frightening like
the big framed Jesus with thorn-crowned heart
that sprouted a flame tuft
about the bed we slept in.

Amber rosary around her crooked hand
each night before the light went out,
she took my great-grandfather's wedding band
from the lacquered box
on the table next to the bed
and put it on her twisty thumb and pointed to his picture.
But I knew about the soldier she left in St. Petersburg
and never saw again.
He ripped off a button and put it in her hand.

Snow made her cry.
And leaves burning.
He would tap his black boot in her dreams.
He would come through the window and wake her.
Once he played his sad fiddle by the poppies--

There were ninety-some years in her hands
when I unbent them.
The button rolled into a corner.
I kept listening for the soldier that night,
and my grandmother smoothed the pillow and said
Don't Worry
the same way we'd said it before
when it was only Lawrence Welk in a buzz of cable
and no Russians singing at all; when
it wasn't enough,
the sustenance of these gnawed-upon rosary beads
strung, indulgences and names of the dead,
amber dented in her hands.

Karen Subach