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The Next General

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Nadya Pittendrigh

The Next General

This part of me sews with stiff shoulders on the ice barge.
I just want it done.
The captain labors next door trading light fish for heavy ones
in darkness. We aren't pressed for time and can't stay away from each other on deck; we hit the iceberg. At bathing time we strip with the light snuffed; I can smell them lifting weights.

The hands gather to toss a couple of crates out on the surface;
But the ice won't crack. The box, says the captain, looks like a settlement out there. Then burn it! And the surface melts.

Downtown, smoke jumpers arrive on awnings, others pack the alleys.
They're all invited in through various back doors, eventually.
My brother is gone and I've been running the tenant houses; I may have the deed somewhere in my clothes.

Here comes the village doctor.
At least fifty green bottles hang on strings around the porch; I tell her it's like a sombrero.
The muffin tin she offers is only part of her collection.
I apologize because my hands are black from gardening. I tell her,
I was born on Ziante Road, but my parents were renting the house.
Six months after the birth my parents finally named me Ziante.

The rest crowd in. “Am I the mayor?”
I tell them my job is inscribing information in the upper left corner of post cards.
I ask them, “How can I help you?”