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Echolalia

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Jenny Flynn

Echolalia

Embryo, cheerio, so-and-so, Aunt Grace says, snapping her teeth into place. She pats my cheek. With age her Irish hair has pinked, fading like an old velvet seat. Do what you have to. I'll love you just the same.

Grace raised me in this windy house, so many pale-petaled fruit trees on the meadowed hill in springtime we seem to live caught on a floe of snow the sun slowly withers.

That night in December he waited in blue shadows beside the café where I serve plates of yolky farm eggs. Beneath rain-soaked hair his face looked harder after two years, a dark carapace of labor and leaving.

Empty seed heads rattled by the river bank as we matted down a bed of grasses with our palms. I always did follow his voice, harsh and commanding as a raven's caw, *Miranda, Miranda, Miranda—*

After, I walked him back to the idling bus. He scraped the stubble of his cheek across mine, climbed on, and
faced me
through glass, rain smearing his mouth to a soft
bruise—

Did you know your name means wonder?

Wonder, thunder, blunder, Aunt Grace has become quite a rhymer, her connection to life worn to that inexact echo. They say I take after her—I inherited the precise thing that shapes her mouth.

When her husband died (a ruddy man who whistled with his fingers), my aunt began to hear voices at the
axes
of seasons. Buds and dying leaves say *Grace* and she answers, *Mace, waste, lace, I still remember*

your mother's face when she came home fat with you! She imitates, leaning back, rounding her belly—a well of bones—with a balled sweater. *Daddy waiting for her, hunched into his hat.*

At night wind creeps through everything I've filled the
walls
with. I shouldn't say *creep*, like an animal: it's a liquid sound,
a gushing. Most springs, the river jumps sandbags,
flooding
cold stubble with rain. *Rain, pain, insane*—how does that go?

Walking to the breakfast shift, I can feel the other heartbeat doubled with mine as I touch slivers on the
pines.
Frost can cut a little before it melts (Grace told me that, long ago)
but then a cold gush usually dulls the wound.