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MICHAEL JULIANI

IN A THERAPEUTIC BOARDING SCHOOL FOR ADOLESCENT GIRLS

An off-duty cop woke you one morning,
handcuffed you to an armrest
on an Amtrak train and said nothing
till it pulled into a city named for orange trees
replaced by tract houses.
You don't think it's transformative
to go four months without hearing music, to jump
into a swimming pool more pavement
than water in a hillside terrace
that has a pebbled deck, a pool table,
ping-pong, and moonlight
waving in the deep end.

The days keep passing but you won't shower,
won't say a word except of writing
that purple book of sonnets
you still owe your ninth-grade
English teacher. One of the counselors
says in group that she knows
a heart can swim
around a living room, through the steel
kitchen and bedrooms
like a horsefly. There is much you can do
and still keep quiet. You can dream of black
snow, a ski resort with a thousand doors
along its infinite merlot carpet.

You can imagine a Hells Angel
 turning on a swivel chair, a few strands of devil-red
wig with blonde roots tacked
 to the wall beside a page of addresses.
As it stands you are mourning
 like the human equivalent of an unplugged phone.
You are not alone in this. You are not
 the filling of a tooth
hardening in the numbness
 of a cheek. You are not an old pillbox
sense-blazed with war.