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Frances in Three Parts

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Frances in Three Parts

I.

When the phone rings
and I am not expecting a call from my mother
I think she is calling to tell me you are dead.

When people are dead they are not there any more
the way you want them, need them. Diamonds lost
in consignment suit pockets. Embroidered hankies left on a bus.

We learned that six years ago, didn't we?
And we yearn for him still, that stone statue
torn down, city hall caved in. There are just remains now,

heirlooms: A navy blazer, watercolors,
a guitar, a dictionary, a pocket watch,
a headstone on a hill,

and the ghost you live with every day, sneaking up,
making you cry at things that are more happy than sad,
like holidays, and finding old pictures in unexpected places.

Although I've admired them from afar,
I fear for when you leave me with your jewelry,
quilts, knickknacks and canopy bed.

I can sleep in that warmth
and adorn my wrists gladly but I will feel you
down my spine, like a cold glass of tea,

because when people are dead they are not there any more
the way you want them, need them to be, asking
if you need sugar or lemon or something to eat.

II.

I have a picture of you when you were young.
They said you looked like a movie star.
Narrow and slight with elegant limbs,

delicate features, in the middle of your face,
like a country mouse. Your teeth, small town.
Spaced out evenly, not quite like a fence, but almost.

But I didn't know you then, though I dream I did.
I know you now, sweater sets and sun spots,
creased, tidy, widowed and worn.

My favorite woman, silvered and shining.
Eighty and endless, you have to be.
You have to be.

I need you forever perched in your chair,
yelling at your cat. I need you forever,
green beans canned on a shelf.

You are scraps of fabric from a sweeter time.
Tell me about the coal, the garden,
the watermelons from Florida in the truck bed.

Although I've admired them from afar
I fear (x) when you leave me with your
quilts, kitchknacks and canopy bed.

III.

I will think of you as long as there are peaches,
as long as there is yarn or a needle and thread in my hands,
as long as there are stone houses, cobblers, patios,

birthday candles, glasses on a chain,
cross word puzzles, discounts,
ironing boards, blackberry bushes,

or naps in the middle of the afternoon.
Frances, my kindred sister, my grandmother,
my key to the old home,

I adore every knot, stitch, tear, and seam.
I hope I silver like you, without salt and pepper fear,
just grace and playing cards,

never fearing the next season,
only craving the fruits and vegetables
that will taste like new.