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Chores, Then and Now

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Chores, Then and Now

“The Windex and the rag, Paul.”
What, is he that wonderful with windows
that you ask him to clean them every time
and stick me with the garbage?
I just know that he stands for minutes
by the sliding door to the deck
and pushes the rag into the corners
with his little fingers,
too young for callus or dislike.

I don't have that indifference to the trash;
I lug the big, black bag
from the kitchen to the curb bitterly –
a bag that smells like chicken bones,
empty ice cream cartons –
the things that fill your veins with sediment
that collects for twelve more years
before the call at college, Dad's tense voice
trying to keep me calm,

and I think of all the chores
I never did for you, or did grudgingly,
and I swear I'd take out the trash a hundred times
and wash all the dishes without a word
and scrub those windows myself
if that would help clean your heart;
if these hands could heal,
if my will could make it pulse anew,
I would clean your heart to the corners.

--Dan Rohrer '03