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Lily

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Lily

For L.R.

You washed your dress
in a river
made brown by so many skins
some days it ran red,
and hoping some color
might wash off
on you,
you drank with your hands
cupped together,
a small white offering
bowl.

Not even seventeen,
you already belong
to this man,
your chiseled wrists,
your spoon bone ankles sharp and smooth.
Even the blue flowers
on your back are his,
the paisley handprints
prettier
than your mother's patterned
china bowl
with the chip in its tooth.

He washes you
in the cold-skinned tub,
water stinging
from the stove.
You scrub and scrub.
The water burns
like blood
down your back,
but still your hands shine
white as new butter,
transparent
in the stare
he calls moonlight.

You drown
in the big metal bed.
Blankets twist, shadows on a sheeted moon.
Your legs become water
in the bruised dark, disfigured
through wax paper windows,
and yes, you know what the stars are.
They are fireflies
that flew too high and got caught
in the trees
like you
in this Salem town.

—Alison Stine '00