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HELENA MALTON

Tannenbaum

"Are you happy?"
You have worn out the words
with asking.
Ask me how I feel.
I will say everything
by saying nothing.
You take my hand. I reclaim it.
"Explain," you say.
"Tell me how you feel."

(Explain? That I want commas to guide me,
capitals and periods to mark my boundaries?)

I am an evergreen, planted here.
You trim my neck with
kisses like glass ornaments.
"Please don't touch me."
"Explain."
I will tell you and you will understand.

(When Daddy put his
fingers in me I
watched from above with
passive tinsel-angel eyes.
When you touch me like
a Christmas tree I stiffen
my branches for your garlands,
feigning festivity.)

After I say these things
you contract, appalled.
"I'm sorry. I didn't know. I'm sorry."

(I tried to tell you but
trees are ineloquent.)

Does anyone ever think of asking the spruce
if she wants to be decorated?

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