

Drunk

You take your son and daughter to the lake
to feed the ducks, you hold your daughter's hand
and run quacking through the small daisies, then fall down
in a heap, kicking your legs in sync with her legs,
laughing out loud. Your son watches from a bench, sighs and calls,
"Mama, are you drunk *again*?"
The couple bike-riding past look over their shoulders,
an old man raises his binoculars.
It is the *again* that gets you, as though
every day you get drunk and drag your children out to chase mallards.
As though he's ever seen you drunk, your carefully protected firstborn,
as though you manage to drink more than a glass of red
a couple times a month. You tell him
that he will *never* see you drunk
and something in your voice stops you both from saying any more.
You give them their bread crumbs
and watch as through a glass, darkly,
their delight at the painted turtles who poke their shy beaks
up from under the ducks, and you swallow
the tannic memories, protective
of them: they will not know what it is to see, as you saw,
grandma passed out on the upstairs bed, to see grandpa
raving with alcohol, prophet in a cave, flinging his dark
sticky curses. Your son will not, as you did,
hold your mother's hand and lead her crying from their
house back to her car, and he will also not

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be grateful for this, though it has cost,
because he will not know.
Just as your friend whom you love,
recalls with wonder her son saying,
after she told him to clean up all the flour he'd spilt,
"Mama, was anyone ever as mean to you as you are to me?"
and how she swallowed her words, remembering her father
who bent the metal hangers across her shoulders,
and *No*, I didn't understand my father's yelling, but I was so afraid,
though he would say he protected me all his life
from the wooden spoons his mother used
to beat the questions out of him. No, they will not understand
what they have been spared, because we have also spared them
this knowledge. We have swallowed it
and set our lips, knocked back that ancient vintage,
those complicated, full-bodied, stone fruit notes
that linger on the finish.

Previously published in Event 35 (2) (Fall/Winter 2006). Reprinted with permission.