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Flight

Toni L. Wilkes

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FLIGHT

Toni L. Wilkes

Warm porch boards creak as she coils
into a small ball against clapboard siding.
Her grandfather'd always been a rumpled,
tweedy mystery to her. Somewhere inside,

guests jostle through a tangle of stiff sandwiches,
slices of brown bread flip open like wings of a book
smeared with tuna or chicken or deviled ham.
Only her mother would serve deviled ham at a funeral

and not see the irony in that. Somewhere inside,
her brother tosses playing cards into sloppy piles, plays war
with their cousins. Bored, she slips into the crowd and
trails her uncle down the hallway. He stares

at the bathroom floor, its cracks and water-stains.
Peeling paint flakes where he brushes it by the toilet.
At the sink, he fingers his father's shaving brush,
twirls it in the mug. She wonders how often he'd

watched his father shave, wonders if he saw tenderness
in him. She'd only known the reek of cigarettes
and garage oils, a man who walled himself in the shed,
only came out for meals, an occasional cribbage game.

Her uncle thumps a shaving strop against his thigh, then
smacks the tub over and over and over, sounding like
the snap of tree limbs heavy with snow. Chatterings
of the crowd go dumb. Footfalls drum toward them.

She grabs the back of his shirt, scrambles him to
a backdoor where he wheels, the strap flaccid
in his fist. Go—just go! He scowls, shrugs, then
makes a swift flight into the night. She couldn't tell

if it was grief, anger, or relief. It didn't matter.