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## Stories

Emily Ransdell

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## STORIES

From the cold woodshop where we had run  
for safety, I watched the hillside  
glow orange from flames. The babies  
played with shavings on the floor.  
My mouth said *don't eat that*, while  
in the distance our house burned.

In this country where wheat hisses in the fields  
everything holds its breath and waits.  
William McCoulough, slammed off his tractor  
by a treelimb, fell into the bush hog blades.  
The women swooped down over William's family  
like kind white doves. Now they open  
their good wings for us.

They clean us and feed us, bed us  
down in a warm place away from the rubble  
and the smell. I lay my head on someone's old  
pillow. Rose sachet. Fragrance  
of cedar. I close my eyes  
to the flames and see a silver  
thimble, my best cup. I keep thinking  
of foolish things. The lemon geranium,  
all that sheet music.

Put this story along with William McCoulough, along  
with the calf's neck wrenched by a cyclone through  
the crook of a tree. Put this along with the whispered  
list of things found at harvest: hair and bones  
and scraps of a red shirt rotting.  
Be sure to say how fast the flames lurched

across the roof.

In the next bedroom, a woman reads  
to my daughters. It is not me,  
though it scarcely matters. I have my own  
story. To the simple darkness here, I say:

*See the hedgerows and the furrows  
and the deep squares of green.  
At the center of each is a tidy barnlot  
and a white house. And in each white house  
is a bed. That's where we are.  
Blackbirds watch while we sleep. When they fly,  
no one is there to see the brief  
red of their wings.*