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There and Here

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There and Here · *Barbara Anderson*

Someone's lost and someone turns on
the light. In the middle of the night

the boy rushes into his parents' room
but *they* are not there;

only the rustle
of his mother's nightdress as she packs

away his father's shirts, and books, binoculars.
The paperweight — faces of the old poets

magnified under glass: Coleridge,
Wordsworth, Tennyson, Whitman.

A gift from the woman they argued about
when his father returned from a trip.

"Thank you," the woman had written
on the note with the hotel letterhead.

His mother packs that away too, and what is hers
in another carton and the child's in a third,

and the words **THERE** and **HERE** in thick black print
on a lined tablet from the first year

he learned to read; his teacher
wanted him to know the difference,

the distance from school to home,
from this morning to afternoon

when he fell asleep for so long
he thought no one could find him.

Until his mother took him out
to feed the ducks in the park.

Really she wanted to tell him
that now he'd have two homes,

one here and the other there,
and her finger pointed away
towards the mountains on the other side
of town. "There in that direction."

Right here with the lemon trees
neither of them cried.

He didn't cry and his mother bought him
metal soldiers with cannons

that shot out if you pulled a lever,
soon they would be packed away

or broken. Isn't childhood
really a form of insanity, said his mother's new friend,

and the night to come when he would sit
with his father and look down through the binoculars

to the city lights—
a place that was neither here nor there.