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Housekeeping in a Dream

The sky is a piece of mind
outside the kitchen window, the dishes
the dirt. My mother whispers
how to do it
in my ear make a list, make
a meal that will last
all week on Sunday, lie
to your husband, fry onions in butter until
they're soft and invisible as worms, vacuum
like it matters so much of our flesh
is flaking away diffusing
like pink light
through powdered milk and wind
roars down the hallway, knocks
the house plants to their knees.
Her photo on the wall smiles
at my broom—my back—snapped
so long ago
she isn't even ill. I nail
a cup and saucer
to the kitchen table for her:
a permanent place. She stands
outside the kitchen window, barefoot
on a crust of snow, touches
her bald white head with her fingers and cries.
I open the freezer and stare at the frost for a while, until
my face flushes white, and my neck—my hair
turns gray
and blows away
and a younger woman brings
my groceries
in brown paper bags over
the children’s faces. Now
I can only see their eyes
through the holes they have scissored
to escape me.
There was a meal of dusk
and love I should have made
but it’s too late. I take a lover for something
to lie to my husband about
and forget the rest. I’m sleeping
when my family comes back.

Pall

Because my mother was too beautiful
as a girl she died young and made
a horrible corpse. Her female friends backed

off from the coffin
which was quilted
in satin and flashed
its glamorous hinges at them. Frost

scarved the pallbearers, their gasps
and sighs turned to shreds
of white chiffon across her grave. The one

who’d made love to her once
or twice, took
my hand in his after
he lowered her into the dirt. She
was lovely he said, and his hand

wasn’t warm but I wanted
to kneel down and let him push