

Wendy Miles

On a Monday, What You May Have Known

The dark hollow throat of a bird
—caw-clack and pump of wings.

Mute tremor of the blue-tailed lizard
—its slash across the white swing.

The sagging heads of marigolds
 bumped and bumped by the bee.

Or the trees, any of them, with their simple leaning,
 lush ripple and heave in the wind.

If not trees, horses. One of them pulling
 the quartered apple from your hand
 —its muzzle like corduroy.

When you back away, you glimpse the wing
 ground into gravel, quills fanned and severed.

Separated from belly and beak, the wing is a name,
 an ache. You walk away

and you don't look back—the horse's coat like liquor,
 the apple gone to juice in its throat.

And Your Childhood—What Was It Like?

I can tell you in dogs—
the brown-and-white beagle,
tumor at the neck, the one who buried my new pants
near the watermelons that never ripened.

In jars of canned tomatoes (the steam and grip).
In the old gold truck, my father's coveralls, guns,
harmonicas strewn on the dash.
(The metal-and-tractor-grease smell.)

I can tell you in green,
in dirt, in clods of red clay
and a rusted aqua swing set
that sliced my inner calf.

In potatoes—the white quartz rocks
I piled into pyramids at the end
of a tilled patch—the seed spreader
(its industry and ease).

In corn. My brother's shirts,
each sleeve cut for an arm cover
(to reach the ropy pods and twist,
the milky-sweet smell that clung).

In grass, in hay, and the green kitchen stove,
the big bed angled in the front room—theirs—
(if you stepped through the door).
I can tell you in weariness.

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In black cattle plodding (dust motes rising).
In the gust of a train, its detonating blare.

And snow—once with a deep sheen of ice
I walked across, my father setting off
to open the store. It was *bread and gas*,
and *I'll stay if I have to*. My mother, silent, watching.

The Memories

The memories took it hard that year,
all the stars gleaming like that.
And the photographs—another insult.

Dolls tugged by armload from the basement.
The road to the dump riddled with potholes,
plastic arms pointing from the truck cab.

The memories just fingered their nylon hair,
pushed them in strollers, wheels whistling.

Abandoned memories clung to the window.
There was the father. There was the mother,
face streaked behind a roof of hands.

Anyone could have mistaken those memories
for rain the way they wept.

Old memories curled in the neck of a sweater and—
nostalgic, spinning the wheel of the toy motorcycle—
gazed at the steady light of the Easy-Bake oven.

One anxious memory scraped her back
slipping under the fence. There was
the loose, rusted nail. There was the mother.

Plump pinch of wasp and gasoline heat
to the bone. A wet cigar—sopping tobacco
drew out the sting. She asked

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*Who would you want to live with,
me or him? I'm just asking you—who?*

It's thankless being a memory.

One Sunday-memory skulked
toward the old pink bedroom, slumped
on the bed, ran a hand across the spread.

After awhile the room might have been
almost a happy room. Her skinny legs.
Corduroys that matched her shirt.
There was her heartbeat thumping. There too
was the wood-grain wolf revealing itself
in the hollow veneer door across the hall.

So there was the eddy in the gut.
There was the darkness entering.

There were the stars being eaten.
There were the old cows lumbering.
There were the cats set with night vision.

There was the weight of a hand
light as—lighter than—a doll's.