





# Dead Girl Dancing

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for the living, because grief does not die

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## Tradition

The line of loved ones

leads to a satin

bedded corpse.

A gauntlet of

consideration & kindness

wherein those forming rank

suffer the blows.

## Yellow Means Be Ready To Stop

I should feel uneasy  
in this ever-darkening bedroom  
on the evening of your funeral  
gazing in your dresser mirror  
watching you push up your tiny  
coffin lid and smooth down your  
yellow dress while turning  
your unsmiling eyes  
to mine.

You were bleeding so much  
but no one would pay attention to me  
and help us. Children are always crying  
wolf. Pale and unconcerned, you picked at  
the lace on your yellow dress. We were  
too little to understand how important,  
like gravity, you were to me.

I dream you,  
playing in our sandbox.  
Clouds drift in, darken the yard.  
The wind moans, whirs the weeping  
willow leaves and pushes  
at your yellow dress.

It blows you away  
grain by grain.  
Leaves behind your  
perfect impression  
in sand and cat shit.

## Grave Children

See the child grown. Lonely,  
in a pasture empty. He wavers.  
He wears his snowman sweater,

not warm, itchy. He knows the cold  
is gnawing past his edges but he doesn't feel  
that. The anger sometimes ambushes him

while he stands shivering to breathe lilacs  
on the almost summer lawn where she is  
buried – untouchable – fifty feet below.

He knows what the cold does. Shrunken scrotum,  
sticking eyelashes, nose froze in snot-sicles.  
He should go. Nothing here to hold but memory.

And on January's squeaking snow  
memory's mouth ch-ch-chatters, shatters teeth.

-----

They told him, "She has gone. Don't worry."  
Lethal, like Martin Riggs you'll see her again.  
Later – much later. For now stand and suffer

the little children to come unto you.  
Their memories like road-squirrel's bellies  
squashed by fatly pulsing vacancies,

Cracking bone Oozing marrow.  
When you forget, the absence blind-sides you.  
Better to remember then, and smile, silly.

Tamp down your erupting rage.  
Swallow that curdled milk of malice.  
Her aspect now an emptiness. Death is distance

and a nice shearing will strip away scratchy sweaters,  
exposing the poorly mended wounds of these  
witnesses, of lambs led to slaughter.

## Between Deaths (“After Her Death” – Meghan O’Rourke)

I existed in a netherworld

She and I trudged past each other  
caved deep in cloud cover  
separated by the whitening road  
and a mounded shale of gutter  
plowed snow as if we weren’t  
each obvious to the other.

I’d learned how to disallow  
visuals of my sister’s small  
coffin by then. Buried in flowers,  
that polished box was immense.  
Large enough to disappear  
an entire five-year-old in.

Did visions of satin lined  
mahogany accost my mother  
as she negotiated treacherous  
sidewalks delivering Avon  
and preparing to perform  
her own magic box trick?

Since then I’ve walked

my snow boots thin  
searching out the entrance  
to the chamber where I suspect  
their bones are whispering,  
insisting they still exist.

## Would It Be Okay

I get that we are tough,  
that we'll get through this  
because, I watched you  
gripping the telephone  
pressing your forehead against  
her nightingale patterned wallpaper  
and smiling those exact words  
after announcing her passing  
to the voice on the other side  
but

would it be okay if  
for right now I just  
didn't get through this, if  
I didn't even try? And instead, stood  
gaping for an hour or for a year,  
tumbling down the rabbit hole in Slow-Mo  
snatching after her fluttering  
hospital gown, falling  
through memories: her teaching me  
to iron my own shirts, to vacuum, to overlap  
each pass, keeping the carpet lines straight.  
These little necessities I see, but  
I'm still struggling

to get the meaning  
in the nightingales' wobbling song  
and

would it be okay if  
these uninvited guests got up  
from her matched floral print  
couch and loveseat,  
her cushioned piano bench,  
her lattice backed chair set with  
tear shaped trickles of lacquer  
hardened on each leg,  
and wordlessly walked out,  
taking their false sympathy and forced cheer,  
bouncing and straining behind them  
like white and blue helium balloons,  
leaving us, unaccompanied, with her absence  
and

would it be okay if  
I just gave way, collapsed to my knees  
on the ceramic tile in front of the  
crumb strewn kitchen counter  
breaking  
into one hundred-thousand  
boy shaped pieces

and

would it be okay if  
in imitation of the indent  
left behind by her withered body  
in the rented hospital bed  
I arranged myself  
splayed out, starfish style  
to sink, to drift, to drown  
in the unfathomable  
sorrow?  
because

I know  
we are tough  
and

I promise to be tough,  
later.

## Numbers Game - 1984

Teen drug rehab begins with ten  
days P Jed detox on a locked wing.  
Stare through the steel Safe-T screen  
at the playground swings across the street.

Stand in line with the other jonesing *patients*  
for your cigarette ration. In group sessions  
say nothing unless pressed.

On Family Day circle up  
in the one-on-one room.  
Talk about the damage  
you've done. Then,  
Mom is saying

The cancer came back.

Like a relative you never liked, knocking  
while opening the door calling,  
Hello? Hello?  
And it's spread like,  
like cancer. Everywhere.  
Maybe three more months.  
Definitely not a year.