

Nicole Cooley

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## Milk Dress

*for Julia Kasdorf*

The crying spills over a shoulder, over the edge of a spoon.  
The crying is shaking silver.

Now the daughters downstairs. And I sit  
in my room reading. No transport—a book static, open, flat.

While below the girls spin together, rocks in a tumbler.  
Who is polishing edges, who is smoothing?

The crying will be given back to me because I've left,  
because I sit at the window without them in a white dress.

\*

Body like fabric turned inside out, not the black maternity suit my friend  
and I shared two separate winters as each body reached the moment when  
there was only doubling when there was just this black suit so much more  
precise than language, that could conceal, expose, black suit we mailed back  
and forth between us, daughters we hold till there is no space between us,  
black suit that was its own landscape.

\*

*Corsets kept a woman breathless—*

\*

Hospital gown open up the back coverlet of tiny stars to cover—

\*

One in the stroller one in my arms

\*

Less a *breath* than a shudder, the baby latches on  
and in the dressing room we sink together

below the surface of the afternoon, a heap of  
silk and acetate and wool I won't try on.

Milk under my skin like a gas stove's low blue  
hum, under a too-tight lace and wire bra.

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Pregnant – as if I shucked a dress off my shoulders and stepped into this  
other, this another

\*

Or, out on the city street, I say now, forget  
the dress, we walk towards home and I

hold both girls in my arms, none left

in my body, my skin still tight and hot.  
I'm all sharp-edged blossoms bordering

a hem, a sleeve, I'm a field of white, or  
we walk and walk and I clasp them close to me,

so tight that none of us can breathe.