

Moth

The girl I once was
stared through grief and fever
at a devil clad in orange, some earth-arranger.
He waited beneath the pines
as they tucked my newborn's ashes
beside my father's grave, grim joke
or grace: *Watch over her, Papa.*
Papa you died in time to spare you shame.

Three weeks later milk came in,
all down the front of my new white dress.
I gave myself to scalding waters,
pounded my head on the walls of showers.
Oh I was death's girl,
sure to poison anything I loved,
any sweet cock or baby that came near me.

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When my other children came,
a half-light dogged them. They learned to want her too,
the dead sister who made me a mother,
who made me stop, sometimes,
and go quiet in hallways, as if my arms
were full of blankets for someone who was not them,
who slept down a long corridor
in a room where curtains billowed
in watery sunlight.

Or when I
read to them at night and their sweet
bodies and hair grew sticky with summer as they
sprawled all over me, there was a moth
at the window, a soft moon-splotched moth battering at the window,
and that moth could never get in
no matter how they opened
and opened—