

But Even This Is Not Enough

Elizabeth Dodd

She stops on the front walk:
nothing but the steady wash of dust
thrown against the mat and windows.
Cars blear past in the crisp light
of October, late in the day.
No one can compete with such clarity.

And then the tiny rituals
of early evening—she pulls off shoes
and stockings, pours a single glass
of inexpensive wine.

And nothing is wrong. She knows
her lover will call tonight;

her mother's doing better since the stroke—
home now, and cooking for herself.
There is nothing profound
in the way dust settles on each
hidden surface, the mild yawn
in her blood as she scrubs vegetables

for dinner. Nor in the way she forgets
to buy a paper coming home, doesn't
turn on the evening news, her house
filled with the listless motion
of food washed, sliced, cooked,
the stove's electric click of low heat.

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He doesn't know how to touch her.
Pans stacked beside her at the sink,
she's busy, hands lost in the violent froth
of dishwater. He's given this woman his life,
but even this, it seems, is not enough.

He loves her. He stands behind her,
speaks into the tiny contour of air beneath her ear.
"What's wrong?" he asks.
"Is something wrong?"
"No," she says, "it's nothing."

As he touches her breasts
from behind, she lifts a towel
and begins drying the silverware,
one by one, running the cloth
along each definite shape.

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Morning. Nothing has happened
in her sleep. And she decides she can't tell
what she wants, what is right,
what her lover believes in. She dresses
in flannel and wool, drives to the lake
where the leaves are flung into color;
beneath, a subdued smoulder of briar and sumac

scratches across the hills.
She follows one dry streambed,
the low bottom scattered with smooth wafers
of shale, dead leaves and occasional
unbroken geodes. Ahead, two toadstools stand
from a fallen tree, their caps patterned

like grouse feathers suddenly spread
as the bird breaks into flight.