

The Last Time I Saw Him

Noelle Kocot

We built a wooden airplane
and painted it with orange
chrysanthemums, my birth flower.
When it fell, it broke into halves,
one side covered
with flowers and the other,
a mute blank brown.

We were at the house
the courts designated
as a neutral place
where my father could see me
every Sunday. My father's fall-
green eyes changed color
with the colors of the paper
we drew on.

He drew mostly shapes
and I drew beautiful women
I imagined I loved.

That hot day in June
I keep with me like a tooth
under my pillow. My father
and I and our airplane,
talking about how the leaves
would fall in October drunk
with xanthophyll, taping tissues
dotted red to our faces
pretending they were measles.

But then the cab came to take him
home just as my mother was walking
up the street to take me home
and he pulled me in. The driver
started pulling away, one of my red
leotarded legs still dangling
out the door. I thought,
now you've done it and he had.

I knew through the cloud
of my parents' struggle
that I'd never see him again.
And as they both pulled me,
one on my left side and one
on my right, a police car's
siren stuck in me like stray
wires from a fence I tried to jump
over and missed. I was sent back
into the house quivering
and sinking into the muddy-
colored afternoon.

I wanted to tell him
just one more thing
before the police took him.
It was that I wanted something
of his for comfort when I sleep.
Maybe a sweater I could wear
and unravel ten years later
and tie into a net
before he thudded onto the gray
littered street from a New York hotel.
Instead I became a mute
six-year-old stepping from
the front porch onto midair,
not knowing if anyone would
be there to catch me
if I ever happened to land.