

MOIRA MACDOUGALL

## Glass-Light Thaw

Like slivers of broken glass she'd sweep  
    up onto a dustpan  
    my mother spoke of her childhood  
as if trying to collect a self scattered  
    by dustbowl winds. The vacuum cleaner  
roared through our house but it never  
    reached far enough under the couch, so I  
gathered these pieces with tweezer-like care  
    for fear of cutting myself.

Holding a sliver under the light  
    I saw my grandmother throwing herself  
    down cellar stairs hoping to be spared  
an eighth pair of hungry lips, her breasts  
    already harnessed on her narrow hips  
my mom, a child, too young to ask  
    if her mom was hurt or when the baby  
had died or if she needed to cry?

And in the next, my five-year-old face  
    grew still, freckles unflinching  
    as my mother came to resemble  
a dental patient with a needle in her gum  
    when her third child was stillborn: her relief  
numbed by shame. After all, her "mother  
    had managed so much more on so much less."

So you can imagine how lucky I felt  
toting around dial-packs of little pills—  
thinking I'd avoided the messiness  
of their lives, degrees and credit cards  
strung like silver tinsel, glittering in the light  
until an electrical current of grief  
ran up my spine when I miscarried.

“Happens all the time,” my mother chided  
through her numbed tongue and I, too, began  
to freeze—the tip of my tongue, then lips  
as thin breaths of ice held  
the ruptured line between our lives  
but memory and grief  
met around my grandmother's warm lips  
her kiss transforming my inheritance  
the ice thawing.