

LISA SHATZKY

Small Town Suicide

I try to imagine her last moments:
having the wherewithal to get the rope
finding a place to hoist it over something

hands shaking as she ties the knot
hindered by blurry eyes and hair in the face and loaded
to the brim on whatever she could find
that day

beads of wet salt on her forehead
the earth musk of her fifteen-year-old body
blooming with meadows and rivers and mysteries
all about to be obliterated
erased like misspelled words

The pain has black lethal wings
and is wrapping itself around her neck
tighter and tighter until there's no breathing
room left
then swallows her whole
and spits out the town
bringing it trembling to its knees
ensuring it will never walk
completely upright again
(and it doesn't
it doesn't)

I'm with my daughter in the car
when we learn about the girl
In our town what's considered news is what's
being served for supper at the Legion on Friday nights
or the manure sale happening at the hardware store
or someone's lost cat
My daughter is almost thirteen
we've just come home from consignment store shopping
and my philosophy is this: ninety percent of what's in
these stores is crap and ten percent are the gems
the goal of course is to find the gems in the time you have
we had a blast

She's crying now
and so am I
about the girl
about us
about how to manage stumbling through this day
and still be alive at the end of it
holding on to some small faith that
tomorrow will come and the sky will be there
and the sun will eventually come out again

I'm holding the girl as I hold my girl
and thinking about how hard it is to find the gems
amongst the dross and cheap imitations
and though they are there
sometimes we miss them

sometimes we run out of time

and come home empty-handed

our loss

our loss

not many knew her before

now everybody remembers a little something

a piece here and a piece there
found in discarded scraps of memory
which we're picking through
wastebaskets turned upside down
hands in everything everywhere
unafraid of getting dirty
or looking foolish
just craving to find something
anything

in this now dreary town where it rains and rains
we can't bear to walk empty-handed
not even for a second

not with this kind of pain