

Margaret Graham



THE ART OF FORGETTING

I climb the stairs and I am in a room:
wide plank walls, dirty windows,
slanted ceilings, slanted light. Two
twin beds sag in unison, their rose-
colored coverlets dimpled and thin.
The floor is uncarpeted, the air is still.
I can hear the tiny feet of my thoughts
as they scurry away from me, eager
to disappear into the margins. I don't
remember where or what I was before
this room, though somewhere in time
boys are sending bottle caps down
my shirt, books I stole from the library
are falling off their shelves, I wander
down the L-shaped street that aches
like a dead end. I move further in.
I run my hands over dresser, mirror,
coat stand, lampshade. I raise dust
but do not sneeze. I find a box labeled
Christmas ornaments in childish cursive,
but all I know of winter are the cold,
white division signs that tumble from
the sky. I find a violin but there is no
music in it. I find a paper crane to nest
behind my eyes. She tells me
there are other rooms. I turn
toward the suddenly open door
and walk through it. I am gone.
I have forgotten my own name.

ON NIGHTS WHEN I AM PREGNANT WITH A PAUSE,

I feel a buzz, a hum, a thrum, a purr—
A ticklish sense, untouched by the styl-
istic curve of written definition—
Perhaps it is a friendly stray that rubs
against me or a low moan of “Oh, god—
a little further to the right...

the right...”

Perhaps it is the latent street lamp,
the light that clicks on when night shimmies out.
Or maybe it is my sweet socket mis-
taken, a hush wind pushing door into jamb—
a momentary rush that fecundates
a tiny hand beating a tiny drum.

Despite the smallness of what lies between,
some spaces are much larger than they seem.

ANOTHER SIDE OF PARADISE

Last night it was raining and I couldn't find my keys
so I curled up in bed, on top of the covers—
gathered the blanket like a cat in my arms—
let my mind descend into the depths of the bed frame.
When it had sunk through the field of metal coils,
through the hull of wood planks, to the floor,
God came and told me that I was going to die.
He (an old man with a beard of tree roots)
didn't make a fuss, just had me and the rest of my death party
gather our belongings in golden baskets.
"Take everything you'll need," he said.
So I put in things at random: a few pairs of socks,
photographs of me and Elizabeth in ball gowns,
of the only dog I've ever had—
a mutt the color of dirty vanilla
that held my family together for years,
an oversized red and green flannel shirt,
a leather-bound copy of *This Side of Paradise*,
all the while thinking it was ridiculous
to overpack for Heaven.
But it turns out Heaven is just a big old house—
oak floors and rafters, lofty ceilings, white walls,
mismatched furniture, about twenty rooms in all.
By the time we arrived (the walk wasn't long)
it had stopped raining. We took off our shoes
and left them by the door. Mine drooped, knowing I
would never fill them again.
When we tried to speak, God raised a gnarled finger
to his lips. He sat down by the fireplace,
his roots growing into the floor.
His chin fell to his chest, and he slept.
Other people began to unpack their baskets,
taking out useful things like towels and stethoscopes.

I took mine and settled by a large window,
removing items and placing them around me on the floor.
At the very bottom I found my keys. God snored.
Turns out I hadn't packed nearly enough.

THE VIRGIN

I looked up and saw that someone
had left quick and sloppy teeth marks
around the rim of the moon.

I thought, too, that I could just make out
a fresh batch of love bites where the clean,
grey craters once had been. I caught my

reflection in the swell of the Seine:
my face melancholy, soft, like an opal,
my figure pink as a reef and porous.

A man on a boat offered me *un café*,
des fleurs, I denied him with a line
from Baudelaire. And when he waved,

I took the wave home with me and placed it
on my pillow. I pictured his hand as a nomad
wandering south of my breasts. I thought

of a single red balloon about to burst.
I imagined the letter “O,” so often overlooked,
a gentle hero crawling under the floorboards of *Yes*.

I let myself go until I felt the sweet white
tabula rasa, until my limbs disintegrated into
particle logic, and geometry returned.

And then the night went still, the blue veins
of my hand pulsing a lullaby, four perfect
squares of moonlight asleep on the floor.