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Well Enough Alone

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Well Enough Alone · *Debora Greger*

Blood red, blood purple, jet and jade
— hands dripping slippery stones,
she clambered back a dry-rocked shore
that should have told her not about
foothold or balance but that when,

in rows on her bureau, the prized ones
dried, they too would dull. She glowered
toward the feigned or real uninterest
of two men outside, desultorily sweeping
leaves from the square's broken tree.

In dream's ceaseless present, I'm benched
at that window, my mother's reflection
glassily rising. This time when I turn
around, I'm wearing a mask of a man's face.
My hand swaggers to her temple—

under her powdered skin, the warm stone
of her small skull. I kiss her surprise-
rounded mouth— words into wakefulness,
resolving nothing. Again the square's pigeon
cries, "Who cooks, who cooks for you?"

There was no question in it when my mother
would ask, "Why can't you leave
well enough alone?" as if the present
were already being told in another person,
first in the simple past tense, as now,
and soon in the perfect.