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Franz, the World Is Abstract · *Chase Twichell*

They stroked me with white dust,
as though I should feel at home with dryness!
And in the fields around the house,
crickets produced a steady joy from friction.
I was a fish in the watery gleam,
dawn with its lake-light.
My window opened into the sky,
and I was consoled by the hugeness,
and the comfortable movements of the trees.

When I fell asleep,
I knew my world would leave me.
Sleep is full of comings and goings:
the queer, expressive faces of my parents,
the new thrill of rain.
Bending over the white crib,
my father says — and why so sadly? —
“Franz, the world is abstract,”
and I do not know what he means.

What they find lovely, meaningful, and sad,
is all I’ve ever known.
The surface of the lake distressed by wind
like thousands of pages riffled and turned,
or my mother on her haunches
in a heavy sweater, feeding the sweet,
thick fire with balsam twigs
on a cold morning when the year is ill.
The sumac’s red spears.

Even now, as sleep consumes me
(for things happen without us in this world),
the pure, anachronistic flowers
of the hydrangea undo me, the bitter leaves.
My parents fret about the dead.
So many have died,
and we do not know where they are.
I thought they were fish in the river,
and close at hand, but I forget.