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A Paper Prayer

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Two Poems · Susan Firer

A PAPER PRAYER

It's a simple world full of crossovers.
—Maxine Kumin

My mother writes from heaven in rain.
She is dropping ivory painted attic
feather beds and bears' heads,
ice skates and tambourines and monkeys.
Three years ago, my body fat from birth
and confused with my parents' and child's
deaths, a ball of burned off TV color
lightning came from a soft snow shatter
through my bedroom window and lifted
my new boy baby from my arms. For only
a moment, the lightness and sound of orange
chinese lantern flowers, then I recognized
my dead mother. Neanderthals buried their
dead in graves lined with flowers. In the Holy
Cross Cemetery the family I was born into
turns to marigolds and lilacs and bones.
This birth week of my dead mother, my son
wakes me in the middle of the night "Buffalo,
buffalo." His three year old voice breaks
into my dream and wakes me smiling.
Like searching through a drawer I riffle
through my fast disappearing dream and
catch my mother old, white haired, and heavy
carrying this buffalo boy she never met.
His small body hangs half way down her height;
she is dancing him, messing his hair. She
still limps. She disappears quickly as a corsage
of dream, an aviary of breath. On the cusp

of dream, on the cusp of moon, I see myself
young and white nightgowned walking deep
at night through the Highland Zoo that surrounded
my French grandmother's house. From the bay
window, my mother calls me back; her voice
is a clarinet. When neon was new,
and every yard was filled with cherry and apple
trees, the plaster saints I lit candles in front of
always had bare feet, and it never rained stones.
Then, my mother on hot nights slept
with her head on a windowsill. Now
a freeway runs through her place
of those dreams. Still within walking
distance, some nights I go and watch
the cars' lights burst shining from black
then disappear into stars,
into peonies, then prayers.

THE BRIGHT WATERFALL OF ANGELS

Everywhere that summer there were angels,
hanging over the lake piers deflated with prayer,
blowing like soap bubbles past night windows,
flying from the weekend colored skirts
of young girls. In August, under the full
moon, I walked Oakland Ave., and a night
bus, windows burning yellow with angels, passed.
And still, I could see people praying for more
bird angels, drug angels, kaiser roll angels, money
angels, love angels, health angels, rain angels.
There were angels with hearts large as bagpipes
who circled our village's ice cube houses
and flew bright loud into our bang nights.
There were angels in movie houses and in sweet corn
stands, and angels who dropped like catalpa
snakes from summer. One angel followed