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A Secret Life

Dara Wier

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A SECRET LIFE

The not quite invisible flowers
on the farthest edges

of out-of-the-way meadows
should not speak of it.

And yet they listen.
Their spans of silent attention

embarrass ardent lovers.
Cats intent on unreachable sparrows

look dementedly distracted
compared to these faithful flowers.

Imaginary walls go down,
walls of reinforced steel rise up,

walls of paper, plaster, walls
of ice, walls of brick, straw,

mud, gingerbread and glass.
The light-sensitive photo-optic,

technologically-advanced wall of louvres
has a mind of its own.

It's useless to hope
to break its concentration.

When I returned I found four walls
surrounded by a new idea, a bakery.

I pretended to be hungry
for their bread and cakes

so I could go inside.
So many years had passed

the bakers didn't know me
or that my life had gone by inside

the rooms their fragrant ovens filled.
I imagined myself once again

entering the lives of saints and animals
who never failed to welcome me,

a long-lost sister, a stranger.
Our tenderness toward one another

never, never faltered.
My thoughts have hidden themselves

from everything available
which might have made them visible.

An evergreen hedge may take
half a woman's life to grow

and then what should she put inside—
a few plain, domestic anachronisms—

woodpiles, abandoned cars, clotheslines,
a necessary lie, a grave you should

have taken to the grave?
My terminally ill neighbor hid

herself from me with rows of arbor vitae.
I told myself she cared for me

enough to protect me from her misery.
Was that another lie?

Nothing can protect me
from what churns up inside.

My illness secreted itself
where none could bring themselves

to find it. So much of what we do
in secret we don't know we do.

We dream of what we really are
and spend lifetimes denying it.

That was just a dream
I say, forgetting it.

Dreams don't come true
says the empty bucket,

sloshing with imaginary water,
as it's hauled up by the hand

of a non-existent stranger,
hoping to quench my infinite thirst.

Near the end of his life
Henry Adams spent an evening

telling his young niece all he knew
because she would not understand

a word of it and so would never
quote him. Poor Henry.