1981

There and Here

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Recommended Citation

Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.2671
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Someone’s lost and someone turns on the light. In the middle of the night
the boy rushes into his parents’ room but they are not there;
only the rustle of his mother’s nightdress as she packs
away his father’s shirts, and books, binoculars. The paperweight—faces of the old poets
magnified under glass: Coleridge, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Whitman.
A gift from the woman they argued about when his father returned from a trip.
“Thank you,” the woman had written on the note with the hotel letterhead.
His mother packs that away too, and what is hers in another carton and the child’s in a third,
and the words there and here in thick black print on a lined tablet from the first year
he learned to read; his teacher wanted him to know the difference,
the distance from school to home, from this morning to afternoon
when he fell asleep for so long he thought no one could find him.
Until his mother took him out to feed the ducks in the park.
Really she wanted to tell him that now he’d have two homes,
one here and the other there,
and her finger pointed away
towards the mountains on the other side
of town. “There in that direction.”

Right here with the lemon trees
neither of them cried.

He didn’t cry and his mother bought him
metal soldiers with cannons
that shot out if you pulled a lever,
soon they would be packed away
or broken. Isn’t childhood
really a form of insanity, said his mother’s new friend,

and the night to come when he would sit
with his father and look down through the binoculars
to the city lights—
a place that was neither here nor there.