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Watching Television

Laurie Sheck

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Watching Television · *Laurie Sheck*

All night the small gray figures walk and walk. Their bodies
are shadows; the light of their world flickers on my walls.
I take them just so far into my room, the gray shrouds
of their faces, their arms that cannot feel.
They want nothing of me

as I watch them pass through paneled rooms
and over lawns as soft as velvet.
Their small, perfect bodies do not falter. What do I seek
from their flesh that is not flesh, their eyes
like mummies' eyes, enameled, behind glass?

They cannot touch me, though I graze my hand against their cage.
They look and do not look.
Their ghost-flesh disappears and reappears
as if loss were not possible. There is always one of them
entering a room, taking off a jacket,

making tea. There is always one of them smiling
or driving to the beach.
The women's legs are ivory!
Statues in a nameless museum, their voices
seem to come from the space behind their bodies

where the trees do not waver, where the chairs are smooth
as ice. In their world even the mushroom-cloud is tiny,
the size of a cocoa-puff, my thumb could cover over.
Their blood is gray or black.
The gray of a corpse is different: it is its muteness

that is terrible, as if its voice continued to live
and yet was stilled. At night it is so quiet;
the world hovers mute outside my window,
a face whose mouth is bandaged over,
a face I can neither touch nor send away.

But the gray faces on the screen still speak and speak;
they are faithful, they remain.
They glide like clouds through their gray air.
The red pulse of the columbine does not touch them.
Nor the ticking of the clock. Nor the cry of a child.