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Bedtime

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Young bodies stretching in the sun
change skins more often than snakes.
Last summer a mole I'd always had
disappeared from my hand, then showed up
same place on her,
as though my own material
was still becoming her.

They came to me naked:
it's how I know them.
I long for the weather
that lets me see the flesh, carry it
in my bare arms.

BEDTIME

In separate rooms we close our books.
The familiar siren of a teenage couple
screaming threats from one end
of the block to the other
builds to a wordless wail,
then diminishes. I wait, hoping
the baby's rage won't follow,
then close the windows just a bit: I'd even
rather breathe city air than listen to it.
As you rattle cubes in your last
relaxing sip, I switch lights ahead of you,
close doors according to our intricate design
to keep the cats away from baby,
cats and baby equidistant
from our nuclear dining room bed.

We meet first over the crib,
fussing in whispers about fans
versus blankets, the chance a cold spell
might wake her if the shouting won't.
Finally we drop our clothes over chairs
and enter our own bed from our own sides.
We each tell one story we'd forgotten until then,
or one dream from morning,
shady without the spell of waking.
As our daughter rustles in her crib behind the wall
I call you "Daddy" or something silly.
You lay a hand between my legs.
Not for the first time I hear you softly swear:
"It seems impossible she could have come from there."

MOTHER'S INCURABLE WISH

Not yet three, you play in the back yard
with an itinerant tribe of neighborhood kids
all four and six years old, wise sisters
you chase madly but can never catch
until they turn sharply and you slam
off-balance into their arms.
Even as they call you "baby," grab
the shovel and pail from your hands,
you beg them to stay in the sandbox with you.

"What did she say?" they yell at me
as I pretend to be busy with my first garden.
But they're too impatient to listen
to my interpretation of baby talk—
there's a wide sidewalk out front
and they've covered barely half the length
of the block—they have roller skates
and bikes and an inspirational need
to move on. Never quiet, they burst shrieking