Lullaby

Jennifer Moxley
LULLABY

Had I had children along the way, 
two boys, a girl, the perfect three, 
wouldn’t they have played the games 
I see the children across the street play 
in the backyard and driveway of their 
parents’ house: classic, old-time games, 
the games I played all day in the pebbly 
alleyway behind my parents’ house: 
hopscotch, hula hoop, jump rope, and tag.

Wouldn’t they have been hesitant 
to put an end to it. To come in for the 
evening and eat the meal I had cooked. 
They would not hear the words 
of our adult talk, kicking each other 
under the table, confronting the task 
of the food-filled plate before the gaze 
of the overseer. After dinner, my children, 
snapped back into the set agenda 
of adult time, would make a bid 
to postpone the increments with shared 
entertainments (better than none).

But I would only think of money, 
and time’s loss. I would, having felt 
lonely all day long, long to be alone. 
High-minded and with proper stiffness 
I would send them by turns into 
the baffling isolation of their private 
rooms. They would resist, for my 
children would know that once
in the exile of that artificial darkness
their infantile pleas for compassion
will be silenced by the paralyses
of obedience and sounds loom.

But wouldn't my children be able
to quiet their fears without me,
focusing their attention on the
near-to-hand—the faintly-lighted
clock, the rumpled pattern
of the sheet, and so on? In silent
talk they'd learn their thoughts
and speak to the things beside them.

Then, fingers tapping a little charm
to fend off nightly evils, my children
would work quickly to lock away
their inventory from prospective
memory before kidnapped by sleep.