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Glass of Water

Claire Åkebrand

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“A poem begins as a lump in the throat.” —Robert Frost

My father’s apartment hovered
above the town’s only gas station where
a king-size bed imposed itself upon every corner
of the one bedroom,
barely enough room for kneeling.

And there we gathered for evening prayer,
my soft-limbed sisters and I,
under a father’s sighed pleas and thanks,
with which he knitted the static silence of the darkening room.

Sometimes I would unsquint during the prayer
and try to stare my silhouette out of obscurity in the dresser mirror.
We would all share the bed that night, while our father
in the other room read his way through another hole of mute hours,
on a short sofa, silky, matching a Paul Klee painting above.

And later in the black space, my praying secretly
also for a mother before falling asleep,
who had us during the week, sliced certain sandwiches in half.

On such weekends, long afternooned, lilac air freshener burnt my throat
when we all knew he smoked a kitchen wall out of its white innocence.

We didn’t know how to weep together then.

But one night, I awoke in that wooly black,
to the blue sound of TV and when I moled
toward that hum of the restless
to ask my shadow-faced father for a pen and a piece of paper
like a tall glass of water,

he wanted to know
whether all of this was

enough paper.