

Jacque Roethler

Sleep

Night
And once again, she
With a force of will puzzling in one so small
Will not sleep.

Her father,
In one of his snits again,
Complaining about
His truck, his job, the weather,
But mostly about the children,
Volunteers to put her to sleep
And I know there will be trouble.

Why does he begrudge the time spent with his children?
The moments spent with his friends
With his lathe
With his instruments
With the television
Join in a trickle
Which finally carries him away on its floodtide
But the moments with the children
He spends like a miser
With bad grace.

It begins
She lying uneasily in his arms
With him pulling his lip
Drumming fingers
Blaming her brother
Reciting to me a litany of the things conspiring to keep her awake
Omitting his own nervous energy
Which surrounds her like a palpable noise.

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I think this is unfair
For certainly this tendency to sleeplessness comes from him
Late nights in the workshop
Starting the drill press at midnight
With heartstopping noise
Lacquering something at two a.m.
Filling the house with such an acrid and invasive smell
That it wakes us upstairs.

And finally ends with his roaring at her
“Go to sleep Goddamit!”
I swoop down and carry her off with me to the waterbed
Angry, yet pleased:
The responsibility lies with me again
But nobody else does it right.

Her tiny body looks even smaller in the big bed
Like a single perfect pearl
Lying against the velvet
In the jeweler’s shop.

And she,
There in that sea of warmth
My breathing comfortably near
And, comfortably far,
The sounds of her father clattering around in the shop
Contemplating, no doubt,
Some odor,
Wood putty, mineral spirits, paint thinner
With which to assail our sleep later,
Sleeps.