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## This Is Its Own Kind of Love

*Telaina Eriksen*

Someone is in the walls,  
crawling around.  
My daughter hears cracking, and  
they come out,  
bend close to her, whistle  
and whisper in her ear. They won't stop.  
She texts me at 8:20 pm. *Mom, the voices  
are telling me to hurt Dad again,*  
and I see her, four years old,  
I'm carrying her  
younger brother on my hip  
as my careful husband (he's always so careful)  
picks her up and puts her on his lap  
on the riding lawn mower.  
She is wearing a  
pink fleece hat and her braids trail out,  
catching the wind,  
her favorite stuffed rabbit  
tucked in the crook of her elbow.  
Her baby brother reaches for her,  
*You're not old enough yet,*  
she calls to him and  
laughs as her father drives faster  
across the bumpy yard.

Our taxidermied grief sits  
on the mantle of our empty nest.  
My husband's hair is gray.  
Well-meaning friends  
tell us to watch *A Beautiful Mind*.  
She sits in the emergency room.

There are no psychiatric beds  
anywhere in Michigan.  
I sit cross-legged on the floor of our home.

In second grade,  
her friends came for her birthday.  
They played musical chairs,  
my husband removing chairs one by one as the  
upbeat remix of Cotton Eye Joe  
played in an endless loop.

Now her head is shaved.  
Now she tilts her head, listening.

I text her aunts, her uncle, her brother,  
*This is a voluntary hospitalization.*  
*We have to be thankful for that.*  
She tells me there's not a bed for her to sleep in,  
there isn't any hot water to shower.  
I doze, my phone wrapped in my hand, waiting.

Thirty hours later, the hospital that can take her  
has a 1.9 rating on Google,  
ohpleasegodletherbesafe.

I see her graduating from high school,  
a silver cord draped around her neck—*magna cum laude!*  
She's going to college. She has a scholarship.  
*Maybe she will meet her partner there, or study abroad.*  
My husband and I look at each other with such pride.  
We did it. We did it. We raised her.

## About the Poet

Telaina Morse Eriksen is the author of the Amazon bestseller and winner of the 2017 Bisexual Book Award, *Unconditional: A Guide to Loving and Supporting Your LGBTQ Child*. You can learn more about *Unconditional* and Eriksen's other work at [www.telaina.com](http://www.telaina.com). Email: [telainae@gmail.com](mailto:telainae@gmail.com)