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On Grieving

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These dead again and again

follow behind as the goodbyes
that never leave home, overgrown

till they gag in what passes for dirt
asking for a blanket or snow
—what you spit on the ground

is the melt, making room inside
where there was none before
and each breath further away

though you can hear your teeth
grinding down the word for we
when there was nothing else.

You lift a small stone on top

till the smoke turns black
become a chimney-sweep

scraping the dust with flowers
cut in half, were still alive
helping you remember

though once your hand is empty
it opens the way these dead
were gathered from dirt

each year higher, are listening
for rising air and mourners
used to so many steps :her grave

knows how lovingly the ashes fell
cling to the ground as nights
side by side still counting the grass

by twos though you come here
for work, ask for work
with rags and dried-up brushes.

They still cling to your fingers

as pieces :this cemetery
is all that's left from an empty shell

that became the Earth, patched
with wooden tools and tears
to lower the ground—by themselves

take this dirt by the hand
already an endless breeze
warmed by your soft blouse

unbuttoned each Spring to show
what emptiness looks like
from inside where you point

as if step by step sharp picks
are cracking open your gravestone
not yet amber or gravel.

Though it's late for the sun

once you add sand
the extra weight lets it take hold

where the chimney could be
would cover your hands with ashes
when there's no smoke left

—not yet built and already
you hear the fists banging from inside
to show what the door looked like

once it's shut and the next morning
no longer comes by, was melted down
for the sea now crammed between this shore

and the other—you dig and you dig
for salt, want to keep the water fresh
close to the schoolroom bell you hear

—no! a heel-click is what
and barefoot you grasp for shoes
the children will never outgrow

that wait till nothing moves
not their feet, not the laces, one by one
pulled out by the hand, heavier and heavier.

Not with linen—stone works better

lasts the way you dead still gather
as if the sun not that long ago

had a twin who died in the night
became this hill kept warm
for you, your mothers, fathers

and the brightness that was left
to tell them what's going on
to close your eyes, that that's

why you're here, move closer
hear who still loves you
wants you step by step to stay.

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