

JANET McADAMS

THANATOPTIC

Not for the wild girl who taught me French kissing.
Or other poets with their leaps and plastic bags and ovens.
The first, that older boy from school who bagged our bread and eggs
late afternoons. His brother, three desks back, kept his head down
two days running, until the teacher made him lift his face
to fractions and the Battle of Beacon Hill. It never seemed
that difficult for someone else to die.

They said that suicide was contagious and, after the hanging girl,
kept watch over us for days. But those sad deaths only served
to shore me up. Besides, my dread was the dread of getting there.
Like any traveler, I wanted least of all the journey interrupted—
the forced-down emetic, the choked-upon tube, wrist
stanchued and stitched back together.

Then, I worried if the words were enough without it.
Now, childless and so often alone in the snowed-down
village, I want nothing to do with stones or services.
I want my books burned and the body, likewise,
wrought down to ashes or left in a copse of sycamores
to be taken back, cell after cell, by the ground—I want
never to have been here but I am.

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