

Ask Me about Love

Ask me about love and I'll tell you
about peeing myself under the stairs
when my father came home. How
my brother's breath echoed in our house,
in enclosed, dusty spaces.

I'll tell you how long the night lasted
when dad reigned overhead, breaking
brittle toys: plastic cop cars, things with hinges,
glass jars with nails in them.
I'll tell you how hard we held each other,

our breaths when he went silent, the quiet
like a swarm buzzing through air,
a furious static.

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I'll tell you to make someone cry.
I'll tell you about fourth grade, twisting
Russell's arm behind him, turning him
until he saw a new side of himself.

I'll tell you how our teacher hated him, too,
how we laughed at his mewling,
a primal pack of children tearing into soft skin,
unified against his high socks, his sharp elbows.

I'll tell you how he struggled at first, the desperate
wiggling terror he could choke up. I'll tell you
how small we made him.

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I'll tell you how I let dad hit me
in place of my smaller brother.
How still I stood, letting his violence take root
in the tension of my knees; how tight I curled
when I fell, letting him kick me, snap the ribs

around the pulp of my heart.
I'll tell you how I started leaning in
to his wild swings, letting my purpled eye
marinate until it leaked blue-black
out the back of my head.

I'll tell you how potent
a bone bruise is, how burning
copper filled my mouth.

Jacob Little