

Secret Lives

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for P.

A lacy blouse, two breasts beneath.
What is the secret heart
beneath the heart?
What is the fear
beneath the fear confessed?

What is the heart crammed with
fifty years, stretched sheeny with about-to-burst
terrors? What is the cry never cried?

Words, words, words that attempt
to spade into the midden
of cast-off failures,
then sluice them off and present them as *lessons*
completed lie.

Her body, her pretty curving body
with its womb and its lights, its intricate
internal lacework,

performed its miracles offhand,
two births as slight as any
invisible daily chore of women.

So, if it's slight, what this body does,
that must be why death disrespects it, too,
sending a scattering of duck cells
to peck her to death from inside,
no matter how she tries to hold herself still,
to keep herself clean and invisible.

She seems as calm as a silhouette.
Is that right? Can it work? Maybe
she should duck beneath the glittery mantle, please,
of the cancer divas who throw themselves, roaring,
at every possibility? Her cancer waits,
as quiet as she.

She'll tell you what hurts:
the useless repeating
the whole history of it,
her body a field
open to any hand, as if fingertips,
glancing, could heal years

of sliding faith, of loss upon loss
collecting like rain
until the blue receptacle of ease
that was her body
empties to a loose embrace
of bone and skin.