

Toward Your Understanding

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It must be a Sunday; your father,
who works all week, takes you for a walk.
You know it is fall because the leaves
look brittle, yellowed, and sick.
The newness of the morning air
stings the inside of your nose.

Neither of you speak. This is not unusual.
You believe your father is made of stone,
a tower whose strength is silence.
Today he walks ahead, leads you
down Cranberry Lane, to White Horse.
Then you are outside the dead man's house.

Your father says, "He shot himself in there."
And maybe because of the unassuming
white house with the browning lawn,
or the twisting, blossomless crepe myrtle,
this information does not frighten you.
Your father says, "He shot himself in the head."

He leads you to the window, grips your hips
and lifts you to the darkened glass.
It takes a moment for your eyes to adjust.
Slowly, your reflection fades into a room,
sparsely furnished, gray carpet, white walls.
It seems, somehow, impossibly empty.

You see it there above the sofa: a blossom
of blood, a violent ring fanning out to nothing.
In the center of the plaster: a small black hole.
It seems, somehow, impossibly empty,
and as you're lowered back onto the ground,
and you feel the world shift beneath your feet,

your father's eyes say you've learned something.
A light wind slaps your face, as if to say
Come back, and then you are walking home.
It must be a Sunday, because the weekend feels over.
Even the bone white sun is fading faster
than it should. You know that soon it will be dark.

And you can't stop picturing a story read in school.
Fumbling up a stone tower, a solitary man tries
to reach what must be light, then finds passage to a world
above his own. He finds others, hears music.
But when he sees his own reflection, he is
a monster, a figure of banished, failing flesh.

Somehow this fits in: a tower built of stone,
a world, a face, your own face, unrecognized.
Stopping to tie your shoelaces, you hear
other children shouting in the distance.
They echo off stucco and vinyl siding.
You can't tell what direction they're coming from.