

Poems from *Punctuate*, April 2017

### Laundry Chute

I can't sleep. The el rumbles across the street, and the neighbor's porch light burns all night. Did they forget to turn it off, or are they like me, leaving it on in case

somebody comes knocking? That makes me think of the Grim Reaper, who hasn't come knocking yet. My dad's still here, and a few hours later I visit him in the hospital,

where he's getting a blood transfusion, which gives him a jolt and his spirits are lively. He's telling me about buying the blueprints for our split-level house outta a magazine

back in '61. Only cost fifteen bucks! He borrowed five grand from a lawyer client to buy the lot. Talk about a shoestring. Then his moment of genius, standing on the second floor,

the rooms framed out, the closets too, but no walls yet, no plaster. He looked through the opening and saw straight from the second floor down to the basement and thought,

laundry chute! He got a sheet metal guy from Dolton to hammer out the lining and built an opening high enough that a toddler couldn't climb into it. When my cousins came over

we'd throw pool balls down the chute. It made a racket so bombastic, the grown-ups shouted for mercy. All my life clothes fell down that chute, into a closet that was never

empty, bursting with sheets and school blouses, baseball uniforms, damp towels, tube socks and toe socks, pedal pushers and pantyhose. The mountain never went down, just

spilled out of the closet, onto the basement floor. At ten I started to fish out my blouses and socks and throw on a load all my own. I was in a fastidious stage, ironing

pleats in my plaid uniform skirt, my blue jeans, and the arms of my white school blouses. That's a phase from my childhood my father never knew about, and now's not

the time to talk about a young girl's grave chores. I'm here for his stories, but then my cell rings, time to pick up the baby. My dad starts to cry, his thin face

waxy and pale. He says, you've heard these stories a million times, and I say no, I never heard the one about the laundry chute. He says, yes, it was incredible. I looked

right down there and saw it! Something to make your mother's life easier.

### Another Moon Poem

I waited all winter for the windows to arrive,  
for the trees to leaf,  
for my father to die,

and now it's May and they're in  
and they have  
and he has.

I take Lulu upstairs to show  
her the full moon, bolder  
than we've ever seen, framed

by the new picture window,  
tangled in the locust tree.  
Even when it ducks behind a cloud,

the light's a wonder, but Lulu  
leans her head into my shoulder,  
and says, *I'm too tired for the moon.*

OK, I think, but someday  
you'll see. The moon is your  
long-lost birth mother,

who gave you up  
for your own good.  
But who's been watching all along.

She's here for me tonight.  
It's her solitary roving I crave, linked  
to the sea, the stars

the whole messy  
universe, but  
from a cool, perfect distance.