

When my father died

Rachel Miller Jacobs

When my father died
I was washing potatoes in my kitchen,
the graveyard smell of wet dirt thick in my nostrils.
I've read about people who saw a distant
though much-loved soul leap from its body,
but not me—
not until the doctor came in,
and my stomach heaved,
and my bones turned to water,
and I heard the rush of blood in my ear,
did I know, with the certainty of a contraction,
my father's death.

My mother and sister and I
leaned on the gurney in the ER,
like the women at the tomb
too amazed to speak.
Mothers that we are,
we patted Dad's cool fingers,
smoothed his cheek,
made the low sounds that soothe a baby,
laboring to let go of him,
to allow him to be born into a life far away from us,
unimaginable.
And we, dismayed
with the weight of the body he had left behind
(an abandoned shoe by the side of the road),
wept.

About the author

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