An Afternoon...

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An afternoon indoors
when a mildew of dumbness coats the tongue
when now is the mute flash and dozing drone of television
or the traffic outdoors or an ashtry of forgetfulness.

An afternoon for the silent death of a household pet.
The poet could seize a filmy shred of this afternoon could roll it on her tongue and taste expectancy in its bland tragedy.

The poet could see expectancy rise outside the living room window.
The pale and tremulous face it watches. Then, shrugging, shrinking, it apologizes like an ex-lover and fades. Traffic slow and unrelenting, the poet’s arm hangs white from the sofa, she is sleeping.

On the television, lovers’ faces do not fade, do not watch.
The hamster is in the hamper. Sleep, and expect to forget.

K.H.

White curtains hang in the front room, the floor bare and scuffed from the endless shuffling of six pairs of shoes. In the left corner sits a small, narrow bed covered with a tan afghan and part of another. A small portable T.V. also sits on the bed, and in the center of the tan wall is a light bulb in a fixture.

A large, double-chinned woman sits on a plain chair near the bed. Her huge white legs jut out from navy polyester shorts. Knee socks anchor the vericose veins into once white sneakers. Mousy tan hair frames her face, and it’s hard not to notice the gray pleading eyes. She brightens when she sees her son, but her smile fades as they talk.

She begins quietly, telling of her dying father while the son shuffles from room to room half paying attention, half remembering how the house used to be.

He moves deeper into the house, her voice growing stronger. She complains about not receiving phone calls and how awful the lawyers are who are taking care of the estate. He says that he has tried to call. She looks at me, the stranger her son never introduced, while I wish he would come back.

He returns. They discuss his grandfather in Kansas. His birthday is coming soon, her son says shoving his hands into his pockets, and most hang on until their birthdays. I try to melt into the wall, thinking about my own grandfather. Tears come to my eyes and I brush them away.

She sits up, leaning towards her son and the closed front windows. But he is at the door saying we must go. She opens her mouth and then closes it. Could you check the oil in the cadillac, she says. He goes out the door talking about a sprouting maple or oak and then checks the oil. She follows, still talking.

The hood drops and he turns and climbs onto the motorcycle, nodding all the while. She stands by the red cadillac. She waves, and we are gone leaving her to sit in her house and finish her white afghan. He starts the motor and pulls away while she talks.

M. Sharon Murphy