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Remembering Thanksgiving

Gillian Scruton
St. John Fisher College

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Cover Page Footnote

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Remembering Thanksgiving

This house
I know it well,
The cracked toilet seat, the blue water
The smell of Darling's fancy powder,
The dentures in your designated ceramic bowls
The bath tub that never looked inviting,
The narrow staircase that led to my father's room
Where he grew
And where his brothers fought
And where the sisters thought they were queens.
I played up there too, maybe twice
I slept there,
Only once
And I looked at the tiny rooms,
The big family that lived there
Darling's bedroom had a rosary
Too big for a neck, too big for the palm of a hand
Just right for the brown-papered wall
The silk pillowcases were smothered with winter coats
And the picture of Jesus had nothing else to look at
The dresser had a mirror and I don't know who looked in it
Or when or what the images said
The kitchen where I dried the dished on Thanksgiving
Grudgingly
And the closet where the vacuum sat for a rest
And the table with those place mats
Plastic place mats that I could indent with my finger nail
And brush off the crumbs to reveal the flowers on the white
Plastic surface.
There was the TV guide, there was an Avon catalog
There was a cracked mug, cold coffee inside,
And lipstick on the edge.
There was a leather seat I had sat in before with the crack in the corner
The table could grow bigger and yet it never did,
I looked out the window, a big window,
Where the garden lay lifelessly and the hummingbird
Came to the feeder
And returned and returned and returned
I never frequented that much
I just looked at the corner cabinet
Where there was candy
There were bottles of prescription pills,
There was a photo of my cousin standing by his motorcycle,
And another- a black and white one
Recovered from the attic,
The porch, too cold to go to, kept itself from the outside with a single sheet of plastic,
There were games out there.
There was a long table, mis-matched chairs,
a Thanksgiving dinner
And Jell-O salad
And green stuff I was always too afraid to try.
My brother sat close at hand,
And neither of us said a word—
After all these memories, after going into the laundry room time and time again to visit,
And look at the extravagant collection of magnets on the fridge,
We still never said a word
We didn’t know what to say
We just sat there
And learned the house
And learned about the house
And learned nothing about what happened in there
In the house
We never knew what was in the basement,
Nor who lived in the house for too long
Who was born there
Who died there
We were not there for any of that
We were there time and time again
And yet all we know is where everything lay, where the doily was on the back of papa’s Chair
And tea towel rested on the arms.
I wish I could go back there now, take one last look,
Play one more time in the screened-in porch,
Have one more barbecue
And look around and not look at the house
The house, the house
I want to look at who was there
And breathe it in
And still sit at the table and not say a word.
And maybe try that green stuff-dad always liked it.