

Once A Daughter

Some days she screams at him, as if the brittle act of screaming can shake the last few thoughts still holding on the bare bones of his body, his face been honed so long, so wronged, so fragile, pith gone beyond endurance, enduring anyway, turned

into something past-season, transparent, shrunk, October-changed, no recognition of the stalk, the bark, the pulp, the former bits of succulence; some days she thrusts his name into the room testing the simple sound of it, the strength

of built-up years gripped, pulling her back toward thin-skinned remembrance of the way he cut those thick-skinned jack o'lanterns for her, knife deft, sharp, skilled hands, quick as hot tears on skin; and she tries to take him in, make him struggle back

into his flesh, as if he could just bend and put it on, but no, this too-old costume, cracked seams, starch stamped in to hold up fabric gone soft as a rubber mask discarded after too many Halloweens; she wants girlhood magic, old muscles come back

strong, returned to life, not this life laid aside, fallow as an autumn leaf-collecting bag dragged to the doorway no one crosses, backs away from, double crossed, cover this face, try to erase the place where darkness waits, ready to haunt those holes and suck out eyes closed

with what lasts as long as she lasts here beside his bed, dread settled in for this new, scare-the-children season.

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