

Two Trees

by Michelle Elvy

-They don't have tombstones.

-Why not?

-Because we didn't bury them.

-Why not?

-Because they returned to sky and water and earth, in that order.

I watch my mother and my daughter, each wondering in her own quiet way about where this story will go next.

They are rolling Sunday morning biscuits. My daughter is perched on the counter where I sat a thousand times. She's been humming and rolling and swinging her legs, just as I did, but now she's grown still, thinking about the uncles she never knew. I see my mother swallow hard and I know she's pondering what to say.

My daughter looks quizzically at my mother, wrinkles her floury nose. Mom inhales, says *Come*, and they head out the kitchen door. I don't follow. I know they will go to the garden, where my mother will kneel down and tell a story of one boy who loved the sky and the other who loved the sea and how their ashes were swallowed by both. She will not speak of heaven or God or a pink-marshmallow place where her boys wait for her. She will not sugarcoat the story of their deaths.

I peek out the window and see them huddled together, my mother and my daughter, dwarfed by the two magnolia trees which were planted the year my brothers died. It is March, our saddest month. The trees hang heavy with large buds, ready to open in glorious fragrant bloom.

