Two Weeks After the Shadow

by Rachel Swirsky

Two weeks after the shadow shows up in Stephen's x-ray, you decide to do something about the bucket in the garden. You start by wedging it underneath the faucet in the back yard so tightly that it pushes against the pipe with the groan of grinding metal. Now the hose is useless and your fuchsias are dying, but there's no chance Stephen will go out to read in the sun and accidentally kick the bucket.

After that, you tie back all the curtains with old shoe laces, and then when you run out of those, with pieces of fishing line. All so he won't close the curtains on himself, so it won't be curtains for him. When you find yourself kneeling in the neighbor's garden, yanking up the bright head of every daisy so Stephen can't push them up, you begin to wonder if you've gone too far. You wonder if you're doing this more for yourself than for Stephen. You wonder if it's too late to leave the flower bed half-plucked and run home, to unbind the curtains and tell Stephen you don't have to do these crazy things anymore because you know there's no reason - he's going to be all right, he isn't going to die, he can't, you won't let him.

The sun inches to the noon position. A drop of sweat trickles from your forehead to the bridge of your nose. You let it slide off and fall in the flowerbed and then you lean back and wipe the remaining sweat away with the back of your hand.

You keep pulling up the daisies.

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