Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Chanel Brenner: Three Poems

Chanel Brenner · Wednesday, March 10th, 2021

When They Call to Tell You Your Son Is Dying

Go to your vanity
and greet your ghost.

Smooth foundation
onto your ashen face.

Dot concealer on dark
under-eye circles.

You must dust your face
with rice powder,

mark your cheekbones
with bloodroot.

Gloss your lashes with mascara,
separate them with a brush.

Paint your lips
with Afghan red.

Draw fierce blue lines
around your eyes.

If anyone asks
why you're doing this,

say it's the last time
you will look this alive.

*

We Never Heal, Just Remember Less

Stretching my legs
after a walk down our old street,

my dead son’s face came to me,
the scar below

his left eyebrow, the window
of his missing two front teeth

so clear, I had to sit
for a minute, on someone else’s porch.

Four years since Riley died;
since the tsunami hit Japan—

all those children swept away.
You’d think we’d heal, yet today,

at our younger son’s game,
as Desmond raced toward home,

his father cheered, Go Riley!
We stared at one another,

seeing our first son
fall all over again—

skull of memory cracked open
against concrete.

*

Desmond’s Older Brother Is

A blank space on the family tree
Desmond fills in for homework.

Old photos fading on our kitchen wall.

A question
he doesn’t like to answer.

A secret confession
to a friend in class.

A book of poems
he doesn’t want to read.

A canceled playdate.

Memories
he can’t remember.

The vanilla milk Desmond likes to buy,
but never drinks.

A candle on our fireplace mantel.

Younger than he is now.

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