ELISAVIETTA RITCHIE

Waiting For A Biopsy Report

To get a crack
at immortality:
leave better work.

Stop hanging out the wash –
Get back to the desk.
Yet life eclipses literature

though pinning wet clothes
by the inlet, cattail-framed,
on a sun-stuck day, forms a haiku.

On the line, a spider spins
her web between the lover’s shirt
and a black lace slip: an untold tale.

The three-year-old, pumpkin-haired,
sprints at billowing sheets:
this Don Quixote writes his own book.

A puzzled hummingbird probes
crimson blossoms on the waving blouse—
Merely blood from punctured skin.

Red ink of malignancy?
Best tend to the garden where
summer’s last tomatoes hang

blotched by hornworms, bottom rot,
but still good if the bad’s cut out,
save what you can.

Quickly plant before first frost
winter spinach, lettuce, chard…
Who will be here to harvest?

Hang the world, over-rife with growth
and love and fear and death. While waiting
for
the wash to dry, the phone to ring, write.

Elisavietta Ritchie’s poetry collections include The Arc of the Storm (1998) and Elegy for the Other Woman: New and Selected Terribly Female Poems (1996).

HOLLY DAY

This Old House

Grandma called me a bastard because my father
never really wanted me in the first place.
“You should have been flushed,” she’d say
shaking her head. I remember mom
using her body to keep the peace
in our house, trying to keep The Family Together—
“Don’t get married young,” she’d say
as soon as I could listen.

I used to practice smiling
in the closet, in the dark
with the door shut. I could never act too happy
around Grandma, because a smile out of place
meant either drugs or premarital afterglow
or previously undetected but constantly suspected
brain damage.

Grandma said my mother was a whore. She
said mom
trapped my dad by getting knocked up, even thought
I wasn’t born until after their third anniversary.

Mom used to sing in the kitchen, all alone,
smiling like an angel at the birds outside.
Grandma
hated the noise, said it aggravated her
migraines—
six feet of dirt
and now I can scream
as loud as I want.

Holly Day lives in Minneapolis.