

ment is cold with the retentive, deep-held cold of those stones along the creek. But at least it's not damp the way the cellar at home is. No one will think of coming in here, she hopes. "She had to run off to the washroom again," is probably what they'll think. If she can get just a few moments of peace, with no one to listen to, no one expecting her to attend, no one looking at her to see how she is. If only she could stay here. If only this room could be her home. She would miss Pal, that's all. His warm and happy softness. Otherwise, she wouldn't mind a bit. Even going without food wouldn't bother her.

Those tears seem finally not to be stinging her eyes any more. Good thing it didn't start up because if it hadn't stopped someone might have been able to tell. No matter what she does, he always knows. There are only a few minutes before the next bell rings. If no one comes, there'll be enough time to become presentable, to knit this quiet into the frayed, unravelled threads of her everyday self. The next class probably won't be so bad. There's going to be a guest speaker, which means a lot of talking and commotion. And then there's choir, which everyone likes. The piece they're doing now, something baroque, she thinks, has so many different voices and so much movement there's no chance of drifting away. Tomorrow there's a special presentation of some sort. At least she didn't pass out today. Or get caught. If this doesn't come undone, there's maybe a good chance of making it through the rest of the week.

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SHEREE-LEE OLSON

Snow

Watching the snow I think of women
in another cold country
lining up before dawn
in a bombed-out hospital
to abort the babies
they fear will only starve or freeze
of the mothers waiting in basements
with their extinguished children
for word of food
How they must long for time to speed up
to take them to the end of their fathers' war
while I want time to stop
so I can keep you here under the eaves
safe in your pale blue room

You catch me crying and I smile reassurance
the way I never would with lovers
and scoop you up and carry you to the window
to show you the snow
There are no shells landing in this city
Explosions are quieter here
a suicide in a locked room
a newborn in a cardboard box
I imagine her stubby body
beneath the farewell note
I love you Precious
and her mother's teenage agony
how she must have ached for time to turn back
to erase the death from her body
the tiny ghost from her womb

I push open the window
and put some snow in your small warm hand
You snatch it away
searching my face for clues
Your smile is like spring, like birdsong
bright and sharp as a mirror
turned to the sky
I gather you against me, breathing you in
and remember the woman
whose love could not sway her only son
from his courtship of oblivion
and wonder how many times
you will snatch yourself away
before someone teaches you this:
that life is always holy
but sometimes death is a gift

Sheree-Lee Olson is a feminist, a journalist, and the mother of two little boys. She currently works as an editor in the arts section of The Globe and Mail. This poem marks her return to poetry after many years of non-fiction writing.