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PHYLLIS LIFSCHITZ BLUM

The Fifth Question

Passover whispers are carried on a warming breeze—

Wine and matzoh, bitter herbs and salt-water eggs,

Ancient dishes lifted from cardboard boxes and bumpy green glasses welcomed back each year, Childhood haggadah splashed with faint pink winestain and

crumbling silver star glued where I learned the Four Questions.

You led us each night.

You were the rich man leaning against embroidered blue-thread pillow

and wearing a red Arab's hat.

Our flushed faces sang those old songs and you peered over your glasses, smiled and said, Help your mother, and, I'll skip the soup tonight.

I did help my mother.

You left us on Passover night two years ago. Why did you choose that night to leave with Elijah?

Your death is my raw, wet wound that does not dry.

But I know now-

I know the answer to my Fifth Question.

I know why you slept that night

and raged against your pain no more.

I know why you sighed at last in her arms.

You knew, even in your numbing fog, that it was Passover

You knew that we were all together

And you knew that I always help my mother.

Phyllis Lifschitz Blum, a native of Montreal, has lived in New York for 25 years, where she is a teacher for the New York City Board of Education. In 1995, on an education sabbatical, she studied creative writing at Nassau Community College.