

Red Wheelbarrow

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HANK WILLIS THOMAS: *If the Leader Only Knew*, detail
bronze sculpture, 80", 2014

© Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

Stirring the Ashes | *Lynne Jensen Lampe*

They kept her body till I got there, 18 hours, give or take. A good daughter knows the time to the minute and I wasn't that good most days. Losing Mama feels like ripping out a fingernail. Less because it hurts than because that nail's meant to be there, starting an orange peel and shielding raw flesh from a wayward blade.

She, beyond breath, is
not sorry. Blue nylon gown
slinks bone and table.

Thank god she was for the crematorium. No leftover makeup needed to rosy her cheeks and lips. They keep buckets of blush, foundation, even fingernail polish. Some people want the tinted formaldehyde and tissue fillers. I have no desire for Mama to look less dead unless she's not dead at all.

She, skin to skin, is
jupiter cold, gathers me
into her hollows.

Seventy-seven years, then a furnace, a shovel, a year in a small box. They said we could spread the ashes wherever. Last time we came here, Mama didn't get out of the car. Today it hurts to breathe whirlpools and February snow on short-leaf pine. I cradle the plastic bag in two hands, crouch on stone, spill her into dark water.

She, beyond bone, is
cloud food and ever rising,
no one's broken fire.