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Permutations

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Permutations

HEATHER BURKETT

It's like recycling in a way
a blatant changing of the guard
every once in a while
when the time really isn't right.
Out with the old and in with the new
—as the saying goes—
as the seasons change,
spring cleaning begins.
the enormity of the task is overwhelming.
Memorization of middle names, birthdays,
after all phone numbers are learned by heart.
After this is established and there's no hope,
no possibility of regression,
down come the thoughtfully framed lives,
stuffed quickly into seldom opened drawers
until replacements can be developed—
there is only the blankness of that place
as a reminder of what used to be—
then, returned to walls and nightstands,
almost as if they were on vacation:
a mirror of themselves with only half the smile.
A conscious effort for quite some time,
a matter of saying the right things always,
of not mistaking during sleepy exchanges.
Slowly, grandmas stop asking,
become grudgingly accustomed to the now.
In a decided attempt at amnesia,
old numbers are deleted,
although remembered longer,
directly correlated with the effort.

And then, after all has been lost,
after all is pretended forgotten,
the realization that no matter the exertion,
these images are burned into memory
with more force than the original flashbulb intended,
even as the circular mass is laid to rest
into the pink velvet-lined coffin
to soundlessly smother next to its former enemy.
All of this takes place, and simultaneously,
new circles are being formed,
strong—sufficient to once again encircle,
shut in from all sides.