

Richard Solly

A Fairy Tale

Mother calls me into her room,
promising to read me a story
as I lie across the bed, brush
her hair from front to back,
slowly, through thick gray
and black, down to her neck.
The brush snags a web I untangle,
lift like a veil in the light.
I massage her scalp,
the soft curve, and rub
the throbbing temple where the ghost,
she says, talks of my dead sister.
My brothers pass by the door,
having no time for her headaches.
Good boy, mother sighs.
Now I am the one calling her,
saying, yes, yes, thirty years later
on the phone, a thousand miles away,
as she names each headache
after my brothers and sisters.
Whatever I say will only resonate
on the farthest edge of her memory
tonight, when she lifts the phone
off the hook and sleeps with Valium.
If she awakes, high as a star,
her speech slurred, like today,
wanting me to fly home, I know
I'm talking to Tagament and Empirin,
a happy couple.

A Fairy Tale

I write down their names,
like license numbers of suspects' cars
when I am fifteen inspecting
the medicine cabinet, learning milligrams
regulate the miles per hour
she travels. Or like a clock
with only so many hours in a day,
so many are in a capsule. Each drug
I spell carefully then consult the PDR
for evidence. I warn mother,
year after year, until one day
she is 73 and I no longer
expect anything when she talks,
I listen hard to hear that voice,
distant and soft, and she is reading
to me, a fairy tale, one more time.