

The Fall of the House

I

In the nineteen-eighties, my parents' house collapsed.
Stubbornness split its beams,
conflict cracked the foundation,
friction wore away its floors.
Walls rotted from the constant floods
of bitterness and disenchantment.
A lack of upkeep may have been to blame,
or maybe its materials were mismatched,
failed to fit, could hold no longer.
Sometimes houses break, Mom said;
I'd have two houses now.
My little brother cried; he didn't understand
why the house had to be demolished.
I said okay, I guess,
if we'd still have somewhere to live.
I'd heard the frightening creaking of the rafters,
but a seven-year-old knows little about houses.
If I'd known the ceilings would crumble,
I might have turned back
for a final look.
Instead, we left
the ruins where they lay.

II

Our house was isolated;
no family helped to build, nor make repairs,
yet for a time, it stood tall.
In it, I learned to walk, and talk, and laugh.
Dad made power shakes for breakfast,
dropping a raw egg into the blender (gross, Daddy),
and he sang me to sleep at bedtime,

old ballads of the Wild West.
Mom sewed baby clothes from patterns,
cooked recipes from her grandmothers,
and read me endless books
(just one more, Mommy, please).
My brother and I climbed trees outdoors,
came back dirty for dinner, fed the cats,
and the loss was a lightning bolt,
our braided rug pulled out from under us.
Even now, we recall that house,
thinking what a shame it was
that nobody could fix it.

III

Sometimes I'd walk through the ruins,
stepping carefully for my safety,
picking up pieces of drywall,
a cracked photograph, a dogeared book,
a dusty old guitar.
If that house had not fallen,
I might not have understood
the vulnerability of houses.
I might have moved into any pretty place,
failed to scrutinize its structure.
If that house had not been weak,
Would my own house be strong?
I have built over the ruins,
accepted the ghosts,
in this new house my children call
home.

—by Jen Mierisch

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