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Solitaire

Martha Phelan Hayes

Martha Phelan Hayes, hayes.martha@yahoo.com

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Solitaire

For nearly twenty years, we spent
our evenings in this room, each night
collecting a bit of its luster.
In the dark and silent end of each day,
we melted it into candles, made a little light
for our dreams.

Now we sit and stare at the ruins:
grim walls, a bruised rug, deeply
depressed cushions.

A marriage.

He wants clean paint, two stuffed chairs set
before the fireplace, a thick wool rug. He
can drink wine here, read stories, and fall asleep.

I wants to dance, dance
on top of that small table,
the one just big enough for his glass—
dance in white chiffon.

I want to kick my leg up
over my head, twirl
fast on my toes, spin my skirt
open like the spray from a fountain,
throw a thousand colors into the room,
glitter against a fire that
glows like the mid-day sun.

I want to dance across
all the furniture, first on one toe
then the other, my hands delicate
and wavy, my head pivoting my body.
I will brush surfaces, hardly
touch them, my rhythm
so strong and clean.

I will draw circles with my feet,
circles around the dead
things in this room: the muddy dark
fabric of the rug, the sprites
my flight will make of
the chairs, the thick tables

that seem to grow out
of the floor, his body, swollen
with sleep, in the chair.

I will float like a ghost
around the girth of him.
His tired hands will reach for me,
for my skirt, sometimes
catch it against a rough knuckle.

But my leg will whip it free.

I will pass his hungry mouth over and over
my hips quick in orbit, spinning me
out of his way until, like the slivers
of light I watch at night,
those stars posed against the dark,

I, too, learn the art of knowing
and the grace of living
where I belong.

Martha Phelan Hayes is an English professor at Gateway Community College in Connecticut, whose work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including *Freshwater*, *Fresh Ink*, *Journey to Crone*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Orpheus 2*, and *Vermont Literary Review*. She won first prize in the 2010 Altrusa International of Central Connecticut Poetry Contest.