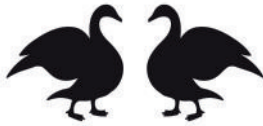


JANICE KRASSEL TATTER

ALTHEA ROSE



She awakens to the dark frightened, tries to remember
the last time she heard voices in the wind.
My mother is eight and clutching Althea Rose to her chest

she walks past the cedar wardrobe, the dresser,
its small knobs snagging her gown. Fingering wood tops
she realizes a sound besides wind

draws her to the kitchen. Each step deliberate,
her feet inch on cold linoleum. Althea Rose
looks into the dark kitchen, her china-doll eyes

locked into that brave stare. My mother prays
to Jesus out loud, one eye open, her voice now broken
whispers. When Jesus doesn't answer, she hides

behind the doll's face. She talks loudly to shadows
prancing by the sink—a musical carousel, stalks of corn
dancing like ballerinas. Then holding her breath,

and squeezing Althea Rose, she pushed through shadows.
There under the oak are her parents.
She knows she shouldn't see them undressed,

their bodies so white against the garden,
father's thin legs, mother's hand cupping his head
on her shoulder, pulling his body into hers.

She always wondered
how the moon washed that dark night,
how the moon paralyzed her eyes.