



Into Perfect Spheres Such Holes Are Pierced

Catherine Barnett

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The family response to the sudden deaths of the speaker's two young nieces is at the center of Catherine Barnett's award-winning first collection. This series of elegies records the transit of grief, observing with an unflinching eye how a singular traumatic event can permanently alter our understanding of time, danger, the material world and family. Marked by clarity and restraint, these lyric poems narrate a suspenseful, wrenching story that explores the depths and limits of empathy.

“Living Room Altar”

*Except for the shirt pulled from the ocean,
except for her hands, which keep folding the shirt,
except for her body, which once held their bodies,*

my sister wants everything back now—

*If there were a god who could out of empty shells
carried by waves to shore
make amends—*

*If the ocean saved in a jar
could keep from turning to salt—*

She's hearing things:

*bird calling to bird,
cat outside the door,
thorn of the blackberry against the trellis.*

"These heart-breaking poems of an all-too-human life stay as absolute as the determined craft which made them. There is finally neither irony nor simple despair in what they record. Rather, it is the far deeper response of witness, of recognizing what must be acknowledged and of having the courage and the care to say so." —Robert Creeley

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