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Funeral Season

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Funeral Season

Winner of Best Creative Writing, Fall 2015

By Carolyn Nims

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I'm sorry for your loss, I'm sorry
that in his eulogy I told how John ate
plums: sucked the juice, tore a chunk,
and licked the wound flat-tongued,
then traced the topography of the pulp
with the tip of his tongue.

I'm sorry I stood behind the farthest pew,
black leather trumpet case
left on the floor, brass clasps undone
(I'm sorry he never told me flags
are exchanged for human lives).
A lone piper stood outside
the chapel piping "Amazing Grace."

I took notes on
the birds in the eaves and hymn
numbers on the pillars but
otherwise I was alone in the church.

I'm sorry for this summer of funerals.
One last Berkshire winter
preserved him like his mosaic room
paneled with crushed porcelain teacups,
headless Hummel figurines—anything
that could shatter
immortalized on the walls.

Through Hadley, Deerfield, Great Barrington
I make the funeral tour, finally turning down
the familiar driveway off Division St.

I stop at my grandmother's farmhouse,
vacant now but in someone's trust
(I'm sorry she did not die with a
thick, long braid the color of smoke
but died in a matter-of-fact nursing home
quite alone). Behind the house is
a shallow river we played in
when we were young
into which I have thrown myself, my brother.

I stoop to touch a cool riverbed stone
and see light and water bow my arm.
Droplets tracing down my tiny hairs,
knives of sunlight through the trees.