

Poor Sad, Dead Girls

Elizabeth Visick

You poor sad, dead little girls
Tonight I am crying for you.
I have walked gingerly in your blue shoes,
Your small shoes, your worn shoes,
As long as I have been alive.
I have let your ghosts inhabit my house
And though I lock the door behind me,
Oh sweet girls, you follow me,
Chase away lovers, take away
The strength from each word
Letter by letter, until at last
I must lay down as you do,
A live dead girl on the bed, a coffin.
Why must you remind me always
Of your grief at growing older and dying,
At falling to the ground like leaves
When you know it had to be so,
It had to be as sure as we were born.

Do not think I never loved you—
I miss your simple clothing,
Your plays acted out on porches,
How you wanted to live on the mountain,
Run away to the beautiful city,
Stay with your mother and father forever.
I smile your same lost smile,
I crawl into the small spaces
Under sinks and in drawers
To show that you are with me still.
Oh girls, I take your hearts to mine,
I give them too much space on my shelves,
I keep them like flowers from my first love.
You are to me the sacred hearts of Jesus,
My religion, my life's work, my greatest design.

Oh girls, it is time to bury you:
The sky is dark and rain falls so often
I must breathe it like air. My own heart,
My beating heart, is angry and indignant
And wants to join the living,
Wants to sing the song of redeeming love,
To walk out barefoot in a white dress.
I must take you now to the churchyard,
Lay you out, pay you proper respect
And carve out a tombstone
With angels and roses. I must follow
The march away through the streets,
Drink and mourn until at last
All of you and I are in our
proper hemisphere, our new countries.

Do not fear I will forget you.
Your picture and your brokenness
Will sit with me at my table,
Each night I will light a candle
And wish heaven for your souls.
Someday when my lover and I marry
I will call you out to celebrate
And we will toast you, youngest to oldest.
Poor, sad dead girls,
may you be forever lost to this world
As you have wished
And your precious youth
Preserved as the stones above you.
Forever may you care for each other
And when the next dead girl joins you
Receive her gently, lightly, wrapped
In yellow blankets like a dream.