

While Planting Hollyhocks

Dixie Partridge

In the dim green
I can't tell what I'm remembering,
or what's been handed down. . . .

There's my silent grandmother on the porch;
the poplars, pungent odor from bark
I peeled from twigs.
Hollyhocks blur through the stirring
dark leaves. Their blossoms already dry
make me smell hay-making heat
drawn to my hair like a burning.
But the tree I've climbed
is cool enough, and I don't want
to answer my mother's tired voice. . . .
Finished with morning milking,
she's wringing clothes from her outdoor Maytag,
tries to hurry—my father needs her in fields.

From still branches above the home
my mother is trying to make of Grandmother's,
I first feel it: Mother works too much
and Grandmother can't, though she refuses a wheelchair
and changes her appliqued apron
every day. The calico flowers
stay starched and clean.

Maybe I'm afraid of Grandmother,
who came outside after I did,
edging her bent joints and falling
into her chair because knees
are frozen in one place. The kick of a horse
began her long stiffening.
She is never angry or not angry.

I am somewhere between
happiness and sadness, somewhere words
are becoming important, and I feel danger
in the need to deliver a message
I do not quite get.