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Sometimes in the neighborhood

Elizabeth McLagan

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Sometimes in the neighborhood
by Elizabeth McLagan

I see her unwashed hair
a thick cap
hiding about as much
of her face as shadows did
that night in January
in the balmy park
daphne breaking open
witch hazel throwing off
its scarf of sweetness.

I was by myself.
I heard the lance of traffic
a runner's lope
like heartbeat passing.
Voices. Then, an exclamation
strode across the lake.

I circled my familiar way
toward that sound
and passed the picnic table
she had spread herself upon. One man
held her hands
so gently, it seemed
and in the shadows one man
stood behind her, pushing
out the hunger.

And if I wished to feel
the silk flesh of a stranger
on my shoulders:

I still turned away
eyed the skin of copper beech
a colonnade
of gray upended crotches.

Under the streetlight
my own shadow
swung out and back
and overtook me.