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Counting Down

Kate Beles

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MILTON KESSLER MEMORIAL PRIZE
FINALIST

COUNTING DOWN

Kate Beles

3 *a man, a woman, and a girl*

Outside, they often were and the house was too.
The bungalow was peeling blue but the steps
were painted a glistening red. There was a man
and woman in bed. They lay back
to back. One night, the woman spat
blood into a clay cup and the man looked out
an open window. Under stars, the small girl ran
her hand down a cedar fence and got a palm
full of wood. She fell from a swing.

2 *a woman and a girl*

Inside it was light. An ironing board was a table. The back
porch housed a bed. One evening, a woman read alone
at a cherry wood desk. As she wrote, ink spilled
down her ring finger. The small girl played under
a hawthorn tree. She climbed up a wall of white stucco. She hung
on the sill, peered through a red-trimmed window
at red hair hanging over a percussive face. The woman inside
did not look up.

1 *a girl*

In and outside of this house it is dark.
It is old, and painted like pitch.
Maples lean heavy over a covered porch.

Somewhere, a ball bounces. Somewhere,
a hammer pounds. The girl sits in a white
nightgown atop a garage, above
a red car, which is closed behind
doors held shut with a stick. The shingles under
her bottom catch on cotton, her toes skim gutter
water, and wind blows hair into her mouth.