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Why We Will Not Have Children

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Ash: Why We Will Not Have Children

WHY WE WILL NOT HAVE CHILDREN

Amy Ash

He shakes a match
as if it were a thermometer
just pulled from under a child's tongue,
a fever contained in the singed end.

We are still awkward
in our marriedness, though nothing has changed,
really, except that our spices
now have a place to arrange themselves
in the brushed steel file-o-dex that spins
by the stove:

 cinnamon, coriander, cumin

and the plates we will someday smash
now match—
we could feed eight with etiquette and grace.

A fragile snow-globe
of Palmolive pops to reveal a glazed turkey,
bald and slick like a newborn
unstuffing itself, wielding the shining knife,

the in-laws ducking under the tablecloth
in fear, like children pretending safety
in a homemade fort.

I send out Christmas cards two months late
with a false return address and a picture
of our neighbor's fat toddler.

My husband smokes a pack a day, and I have begun
to lick the lead paint off the walls, the skin
of our living room metallic on my tongue. And still,

if ten years from now he were to drop
to his middle-aged knee, clutching his heart
as if in pain, if he were to ask me again

I would say yes. Maybe this time
the waiter would not drop the ring
in the soup, would take our picture.

We would frame the moment
in silver, beautiful proof
of our perfection. Whenever I try

to recreate the look
of the smoky-eyed women in *Cosmo*,
I look like I lost

a horrible fight. I cannot sew.
I do not know how to fold
the curved, elastic corners of these sheets.

When will you have children? my mother asks.
I tell her that when we die, some say,
our souls escape our bodies
in an exhausted sigh.

I go outside, kiss my husband,
because I cannot bear
to watch the ghost of us
escaping from his mouth.