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The Process of Keeping Memories

Consolidating them can take time, up to four days.
Sleeping on a sight can help it stay,
make its home in the mind, so it can later be retrieved.

To remember things, those whose speech is clear can repeat
words over to themselves,

say: one arm is up, red and narrow; one leg is out, a strange branch.
The page is wide, the columns seem almost edible,
heavy with color and frieze.

For them, the image will become immutable,
something they can get back with two words.

For us, who cannot speak, who saw the image
effaced as it appeared, we must go back to the vague statue,
climb inside for a sense of the form.

Otherwise we're outside, with no notion
of spaces, no plumb to set on the radio.

We drop down to the inner world of dresses:
today's a paisley print
with marks on the left hem.

How easily the evening is lost, the dress
frayed by wind that hovers over the devouring eye.

Interlude: On Chores

Perhaps you'd consider sweeping
a kind of arousal, half
the torso saying come here
while the other half says stay back.

Dust to the door: speakers with granular voices,
stalks of wheat
pressed together at the sill. Brooms
are for street-sweepers,

not present-tense lovers. Cleaning
one side to the other,
trying to let nothing be spared.
Still, even a broken body

manages to pick up specks: walking,

winded, clearing summery ground.

& Outside

A girl, windpipe open,
whistles for her flat-footed man.
Not limber, he's a lumber boy,
likes thunder, enjoys chopping

wood with his hands. Not many jobs
for people like that—
owner of oaken gardens, cleaver
of ornamental leaves. He gets

distraught when he can't
run around, lift weight,
feel the heft of something against
his spine. She likes to think

he enjoys pushing against rock walls,
urging inanimate things
to move. The rocks decline;
they've had enough

of trying, decide there's nothing
worse than dropping down.

Rebecca Givens

Rebecca Givens has poems published or upcoming in *Scene 360*, *Gettysburg Review*, and *American Letters & Commentary*. Currently she lives in Boston.