Funeral - Sunnyvale, California 2001

Erica Hughes

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*Erica Hughes – Dordt alum, Ph.D. student at U of Illinois, Chicago*

The men wiped sweat
from bald heads
and the women coursed
in black hats
into the mouth of grief.
The sanctuary was full of things
I’d known nothing about:
a vial of anointing oil
an amethyst sweat-cloth
slung over the sharp bishop’s suit
a twisted cross
hung high on the wall
a portrait of a white man—
his eyes pale and unmoved.
Daddy, Uncle Koot, and Uncle Larry
pulled at their mother the way children do—

*Come on, Mama
Come on, Mama*

—trying to coax her down
from her daughter’s casket.
I stood behind Nana
knee deep in the anguish
of not knowing
where the person goes
when she detaches from
her body.
I chewed the word died
like neckbone meat
and remembered how I lay
in the grass on my back
when Mom whispered

*—Kat died
—Complications
—Lupus*

—how I ran from an evening
that burned like a wick
and hid from god in a closet.