Necessary Light

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ANNIVERSARIES

for Donald Sheehan

This is the day of Hiroshima,
the flashpoint day of bodies, bright
as the briefest star. And you remind me
that this day is also a high holy day,
the transfiguration, when Christ went up
on the mountain and in the company of three
disciples, became light just as those
Japanese bodies became light.

I am sitting on a gray folding chair
thinking about connections—August 6th,
my God—the day my father died. Not moving,
not taking my eyes from the compassion
in your face, I stumble back to my tenth summer,
the phone call that blasted something away forever.
Suicide leaves survivors wanting something
to explain it, the way even now I want
some cloaked guide to step from the shadow
of a casket saying: This, child, is how it was.

Noontime, on the gentle slope of lawn,
a woman tells me on this day
last year, she set flowers and candles
adrift on a long river for the world.
And I wonder how, against the immensity
of Christ or of arms, incandescent in a cruel
cloud, one small death can matter,
can share the same syllables in the throat,
the same vowels floating across the vaporous air.
My father. My father.

Later, from one small bedroom window,
I watch the soft arching of Mt. Kinsman,
a blue sky and a cloud rising,
a lightning rod atop a cupola.
The day gathers itself: this festival,
Hiroshima, these hills, your voice,
and yes, Christ, in whom I may not even believe, 
and the suicide of my father, all lifting 
into this pine-laden air, all rising 
and igniting like candles, 
like a procession of flowers and candles 
over these wavering White Mountains.

_The Frost Place, Franconia, New Hampshire_