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Lindsay, Frannie

Published by Utah State University Press

Lindsay, Frannie.
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Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/10428.

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WHERE SHE ALWAYS WAS

Under the muslin shroud on my mother's violin-playing chair is a lap where marigolds never could grow, her last attempt to stand up. The ladderback creaks and fusses: she's flushed from her day of trills and legato,

and now she tilts her sweaty red tumbler of lemonade to her solemn lips. I kneel before her big cracked feet with their yellowy nails, and cool her peeled arches with the rays of my hands. I roll her bandage-thick hose up to her ankles and help her on with her durable lace-up shoes.

I would stay—a daughter, a hanger-onner—but evening is falling; its velour robe across the upholstery. I would bring her the newest dress she'd ever seen, its sale tags fluttering, its crinkled breeze of rayon busied with marigolds. Then I would tug the big sleeves over the pleated flesh of her splendid elbows, and press the unblossomed snap against the trench of her throat.