


Furnace
Michael Daley

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We are in the cellar; we are shoveling coal.
She is shoveling; I am only five. And useless.
She is angry. Whether with me, or not with me,
cursed be the boy in cowboy pajamas who shines
the ceiling with his tin quivery flashlight.

I have frozen her in memory, white
in cocktail waitress skirt and blouse, in nylons and heels,
bent to the heavy shovel she clanks in the coal-chute
while I brighten the cave.
As flame escapes, the iron door creaks open,
God's golden claw breaking out.

Yesterday, I saw the pictures
of Turkmenistan's Darvasa Well—
scorched on the lenses of tourists since 1972.
Despite Dante's night sweats and visions,
he descended here, out of love.

Out of love, my father, fingers caging a shot glass,
calculates how to tell her he is wronged
by the work she does for tips from drunks with sideburns.
The black moles of his eyes emerge to gather my childhood,
then he descends like dirt down that torched well.

A hundred meters wide. What diamond is his mind?
After Freeze Tag on Annabel Street,
her coal fire kept us safe: Stop!
We are not moving. The planet didn't ricochet.
No oil spill rings the moon. Nothing's changed. I am it.