

Lost and Found
PDX Writers, 2012

The sense of loss was vast and dark and cool to the touch. It was silent, for words were of no use here. All the talking had been talked, all the crying cried, all the explainings explained. It was down to the time of endless, dark waiting.

Death is supposed to be an actual *thing*, isn't it? Something you could use as a target at which to fling your white-hot anger, resentment and helplessness.

When her aunt, with eyes broken into and robbed of their luster by grief, walked up to where she was curled up on the faded sofa, looking at the television in the corner but not seeing it, and said "you need to come see her now," it was like all the air had been sucked out of the room. It was always a dramatic moment in movies, this big, emotional nosedive into *The Inevitable*; but nothing like how she felt as she walked toward her mother's bedside. Not this searing hollowness, all her nerves laid bare and raw.

Like in a movie she remembered, she saw the butterflies, gentle and innocent and somehow kind, rising in a synchronized cloud of amber and yellow and crystalline blue/black, rising from the midst of her mother's bed and curling upward and out the window, the sunlight making them appear like floating jewels. They were a gift to her. She had not expected that this time could in some strange way be a thing of beauty. She wanted to fly with them for awhile, wanted to embody their lightness and grace as they fluttered together into the morning. As if this departure from this life, toward this Next Thing, wasn't necessarily so dark and deep and scary after all.

A catch of breath brought her back to where she stood. Her aunt turned away from the bed, weeping. Her mother, now beyond reckoning, no longer breathed. The butterflies took her final breath with them skyward on light wings of color, she was sure, and released her mother from gravity and worldly cares.