

## The Year's Last Banquets

*By Dixie Partridge*

*There are only two or three human stories. . . .  
they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if  
they had never happened before.*

—Willa Cather

The soil-hill at an empty gravesite:  
pungent and dark as rye,  
and faint green grasses stretch oddly  
across December ground like pasture.  
Then the funeral procession  
longing through streets. . . . lines of bright flowers  
and dark clothing.  
At the dinner following:  
warm soups and breads;  
doughs risen overnight in the ovens  
of friends, family zeroed-in  
from every grade of winter.  
Outside the sky streaks, taut;  
an ice-crystal star moves in  
with its cold.

. . .

Three days ago, this death,  
and my daughter and I far south  
at her marriage: those forty looped buttons  
down sleeves and bodice,  
angled mirrors in the bride's room  
reflecting her pearl gown endlessly  
back . . . or perhaps it was forward . . .  
but a wrenching in the chest  
that turned everything fragile  
is what I'll remember.  
Our friend's heart went tight  
in its failure those moments; and what  
should we have known as evening moved on  
and we cut the spiral cake and received  
our guests along a calm Pacific,  
long lines of well-wishers,  
the night air lavender  
and shimmering, the moon  
a loaf of light in the trees.

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