

Sometimes You Don't Need the Words

I had never heard him say  
*I love you*  
but I knew he did

I felt him standing quietly  
at my bedroom door  
when I was feverish  
and when my eyes closed  
his cool hand rubbed my back  
until I fell asleep

I sensed his sadness when I was naughty and Mummy scolded me

In 1939 I spat out sucked pomegranate seeds  
from exotic hard- shelled  
pink globes he bought for me at a Chinese grocery store  
in the days when *I love you* was saved for sweethearts and valentines  
not for children

I knew it when I wavered on my red two-wheeler  
his hand holding onto the seat  
his puffing encouragement  
his legs flailing  
his laughing when I wobbled alone  
down the straight cinder road  
my blond curls bouncing  
my little hands gripping red rubber  
my scabbed knees bending and straightening  
bending and straightening

I knew it when we smoked cigarettes  
together on the backyard canvas swing  
he listened to my chatter and I knew  
though he never said it

He was so polite and soft-spoken  
an aunt told me *He bumped into my canary's cage and said*  
*Excuse me*

When I became old, a friend told me what I had forgotten  
that he came home when my friends were at play  
and hugged me and said *Hi princess. Hello girls*  
I knew it then

I knew it when I held his hand in the hospital  
one useless hand  
limp on the white cover  
his good hand clutching mine  
as he had my bicycle seat  
so long ago  
unable to say the words

I had never needed to hear



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