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Absence Cannot Be Imagined, Only Felt

Betsy Hulick

The millisecond of postponement
in a dancer's descent, fish scales
articulated in sunlight,
a distant music carried on air
turning the lock on the mind's prison,
none of this will follow me there,
and yet, I picture myself alive
when dead, with memory still intact.
That is why hell and heaven persist
in the iconography of the soul
as places, although who can deny it:
With Auschwitz, the template for hell
has been exhausted and Islam's
view, privileging the erotic,
is thin soup for the hungry heart.
No touchstone, no talismanic good,
not even the thanks that I've lived
in my time, can penetrate there,
where none commit suicide, go mad,
or compose "Tristan and Isolde."
Those for whom sleep is a refuge
and waking a punishment know well
this arrangement is for the best.
But my postcard to earth, had I one,
would simply say: "I miss you."