

## Digging

Claudia Ferradas, Argentina

“Bring me those books,” my father said,  
gasping for breath and leaning on his shovel,  
his forehead crowned with thorny beads of sweat,  
unwilling executioner about to lift his axe.

So one by one...  
glossy covers,  
leather-bound volumes,  
yellowish pages bookmarked with a dry rose  
all found their way into the common grave.  
No words of mourning,  
no ritual of farewell  
as he shovelled the dark earth back on top,  
at the back of our garden,  
where the red swings of childhood used to be.

“Hard times are coming, kid,” I heard him say.  
And they did come indeed.  
Times when names would be erased from my address book  
and people would go missing like those words  
consumed by bookworms more curious than myself.

I never dared to ask him if he knew  
of that one volume I smuggled into school  
to read aloud to avid teenage ears,  
to share the thoughts we were told not to think.  
A vocation discovered.  
A loss of innocence I kept all to myself.  
It’s on the same shelf still,  
safely wedged among those that have replaced  
the ones that lie under the new pine tree.

As I teach, as I learn, as I read,  
I hear that shovel scrape the dry thick earth  
But feel a lighter weight under our cross.

Dad, I’m still reading it.

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