

MAGNOLIA AVENUE

The name of the street was Magnolia Avenue,
but there were never any magnolias on it.
In the spring it was muddy.
Snot-nosed Dotty lived next door.
Wearing rubber boots, she waded
in the wet brown ooze, called out to me,
"Come on in, the water's fine."
There was beautiful thick mud that morning
all over my stockings.
My mother scolded, called me away inside.

I climbed the stairway from the front hallway
to slide down the banister all afternoon,
once, twice, a dozen, twenty times.
"You'll hurt yourself," my mother called, grumbling.
"You'll ruin your flowered panties."

I fell asleep playing with paper dolls.

In the evening after supper
I stood by the kitchen window eating cake
looking across at the window of Dotty's house.
Dotty's mother had black lace curtains.
They were drawn tight. Nobody looked out.

"Come away from the window," Mother said.
"Someone will think you're spying."

I never saw the inside of that room
and it was years before I saw magnolias.

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