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*19-19*

The game went into overtime that night. The moon didn't stay  
To witness, having other places to be. On top  
Of Mount Thoradour she couldn't wait  
To lose her virginity. This was before the war.  
Before he would leave her

Pregnant with Sierra, alone, until he returned,  
His left arm's ghost dangling from his side like a medal.  
He was lucky, he'd tell her, her hair  
Against his bruised cheek. The scent of her

Like orange groves for the first time again. This  
Was before the dance where her little sister, who scored  
The tying points in the game that night would break  
Her ankle while dancing with George Thyman,  
Her curious white bone pushing through the skin

Of this world before being forced back,  
Sewn tight under the ivory-dry cast.  
But this was before color. The black and white  
The newspaper took still hangs on their father's wall.  
Whenever Sierra sees the picture: her aunt's

Long caterpillar body balancing up toward the basket,  
She remembers her mother pointing to the photograph saying  
*This was the night when the door to my womb unlocked.*  
When they married for Sierra, her sister came  
On crutches with George Thyman. This was before

The last witch trial had taken place. In dense forests  
Skirts still fanned cautiously around dark fires.  
And this was before the reunion, before Sierra's mom  
Would pull her blue Ford over to the side of the road  
To wait out the storm. It was before the police would find her car

The next morning, empty, blood still wet on the steering wheel's rim,  
Black windshield wipers, broken, lying in the back seat.  
This was when murder first entered the town of Pulaski.  
The newspaper ran a story on the accident: Sierra's face  
In color on the cover next to a reprint of her missing mother.

This was before the picture of her aunt that night on the basketball court  
Would fade. That night on the court, ball rising from the arch of her  
Fingers, circling the rim of the basket, wavering,  
Then falling in, the whole world  
Seemed right—she will remember this feeling  
When she buries the ghost of her sister's body in an empty casket.

She will remember this as she buries her face  
In her brother-in-law's empty sleeve, her niece embracing  
The idea of the basketball  
That made everything possible, everything feel  
Secure. The way it fell through the chute, guided  
By holes in the net. This was before the casket hit the ground.  
This was before the war.