

Joanna C. Scott

## SONNETS ON THE DEATH OF A CHILD

... Kendall, in memoriam

### THE DYING OF CHILDREN

The little girl next door has died. All of Baltimore  
gave blood but still there was not enough.  
Last night, her brother drove his dirt bike violently  
up and down the cul-de-sac, and this morning  
all the old, cruel things were said about  
a loving God. From noon until the summer sky  
turned black, friends and strangers journeyed  
to and from the house, clinging to their children.

A hundred years ago, every mother in this town  
had at least one small grave to weep beside.  
She bore and buried, bore and buried, bore  
and died. But we are not accustomed  
to the dying of our children. We kneel and weep  
for one, as she wept for her four, or five.

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## CORTEGE

Out of the church the cortege slowly wound,  
blocking the traffic all along York Road,  
ramps to the howling beltway round the town,  
as though despair for one small girl had slowed  
a while the whole world's clamorous enterprise.  
And all along the route the people came,  
calling each other with low, urgent cries,  
and stood, heads bowed, before the child whose veins,  
her own blood turned to gel, flowed at the last  
with healthy blood from every one of theirs.  
Strangers, they bled for her these six weeks past,  
and now the summer air was dense with prayers  
for this child's soul; and not for hers alone.  
The fear of death hung heavy on each one.

A woman, urgent in a battered van,  
tried now to break across the sad blockade.  
A sweating young policeman flagged her down,  
waved an accusing finger in her face.  
She shook her fist at him and cursed, swung hard  
into the outer lane, jolted her way,  
mouth pursed, until she drew beside the car  
behind the hearse in which the coffin lay.  
And now she honked, tight at the sheriff's heel.  
He boxed her in, refused to let her pass.  
She tailgated, beat on the steering wheel;  
his flashing light said, No. Behind dark glass,  
the dead child's brother turned. His still face watched  
this stranger rage, rage, as he could not.

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