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Naked Ladies (Amaryllis Belladonna)

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Naked Ladies

(Amaryllis Belladonna)

by Rachel de Baere



After school each day, the road I walked
was dense with cars and heat.

Strangers in strange houses peered from behind curtains—
men with desire for little girls and old women
who wanted to poison me.

I was told to cross the street when I saw them.

My mother's house
was dark with aches, smells of burned beans
and forgotten wet laundry.

Black lines of ants marched in single file on counter corners
and linoleum floors.

I washed my mother's pain, disinfected the smells,
wiped away the ants, gathered dirty wine glasses.

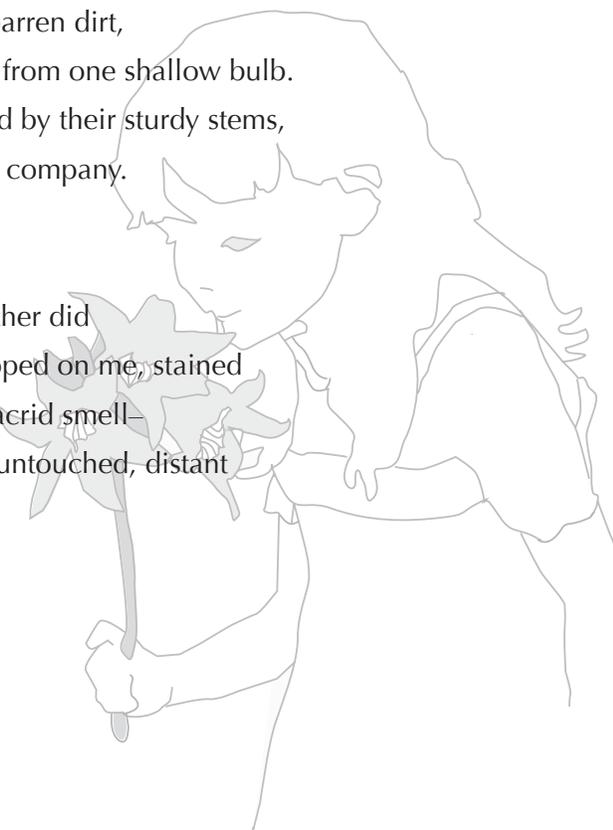
I had never seen them, growing wild in barren dirt,
sprouting in populous bunches, so many from one shallow bulb.

Soothed by their pastel pink, strengthened by their sturdy stems,
I wanted to bring them home to keep me company.

The day I cut those virginal flowers,
lacerated them at the base of the bulb

with a sharp rock, I was doing as my mother did
to buds in her own yard. Their juices dripped on me, stained
my clothes, my legs, my bare feet. Their acrid smell—
the scent of theft—was better left behind, untouched, distant

as a part of wild beauty
not to be brought home, ever.



Illustrations by SWOSU Design Studio