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Opening Extract from...

The Floating Man

Written by Katharine Towers

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Pianola

This is the tune it has known all along
but kept in its puppeteer's chest of velvet and string.

The notes of Chopin's *Ballade* march out,
as if years of practice have put them
beyond the reach of mistake or expression.
The keys dip and lift, efficient as clocks,

and we notice the piano's reluctance to tremble or weep
as the signature dims into minor. When the *adagio* comes
there's no sigh, no blissful easing of fingers,
only a rickety pause that wants to be over.

With the last chord, the piano relaxes and shudders,
as if it has said what it meant, and none of it mattered.

Planting Tulips

They might have thought I was praying,
knelt so long on the path; and truly
my hands were glad to be down in the dead earth.

Today a man was lifted from our bog.
He came out dark, shining like a length of flexed rope
and opened his inside-out eyes to the sky.

I would have said to leave him be
under the mosses and ling in the bog's orange juices,
not to take him from his own people.

I can almost forget which are my fingers
and which are worms trickling between them.
Perhaps I look like a beast run to ground,

or someone weeping. In spring
these tulips will come up black, stately.

In the Oak Woods

I waited to hear
the owls' late evening
call to prayer.

I lay down
under old-fashioned oaks,
quiet for fear the owls might startle
and fly from their rooms.

I waited to hear
the owls' late evening
call to prayer

and dreamed of moonshine
and moths, the sidelong
sidestepping fox who turned
to ask why I stayed.

I waited to hear
the owls' late evening
call to prayer

and lay all night
in old-fashioned woods
as the owls' pale faces
turned to ash in their rooms.