

Joseph and Mary

Her mother clasps my hand as we watch her dreaming.

Her idea of parenting is to be watchful, be available, be patient.

I am more about the worrying –

How will I keep her safe?

How can I protect her from fear and grief?

How can I protect myself from sorrow

if I fail?

Now her mother is holding her after a fall,

patting her back, crooning meaningless words

that comfort even in their emptiness.

I stand helplessly aside, glaring at the bandaged wrist

furious that I was not there beside her

holding her up until she learned balance.

Now we are lying head to foot on the soft old sofa,

uninteresting drama playing on the TV.

She looks up from her reading:

“How do you imagine God,” she asks.

“An earth-mother? A vengeful purveyor of laws?”

After I shrug, she sits up taller and presses me.

“Don’t you think we should be clear in our faith,

if only so she learns from watching us?”

I scowl at the shallow characters on the screen
and try to think honest thoughts.

“Neither of those,” I offer cautiously.

“The earth-mother may bring love, but not discipline.

The law-giver is more about obedience than wisdom.”

I think another few thoughts and add,

“I want God to show us which way to go for our best,

But leave us to make our own departures.

To care about us enough to give us good rules

And to have enough faith in us to allow our misjudgments.”

I could see that she was wondering if this was an indictment

And if so, was it of her? So I finished my idea:

“I would gladly give up perfect protection

For wisely informed freedom.”

I could not make out the meaning

Of her serene Madonna smile.

