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Poetry by Ellen McGrath Smith



Therapy

There are things you can assemble,
small and temporary, on a table,
or on the floor between spread legs,
like a child blocking out
the adult chaos all around her:

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a silver dollar seedpod
near an actual silver dollar,
a pine cone on a mirror, a fire lizard
dried in its rearing-up position,
one green plastic soldier, a tarnished
Saint Christopher medal, a stamp
steamed off a letter from Japan.
Call it a microcosm or just let it stand
for as long as it stands, for as long
as it takes your attention and care.
Move the objects around,
scratch out new stories or new endings
for the stories you've inherited.
The story with a car in a forest
at the edge of the world.
The story of war, a dragon
scorching the earth for miles.
The story of the raging father.
Seed money, the future, the hair
of the dog. None of it is meant
to last, especially since it's all
made of the past. There's a stream
behind your house you've never seen.
At night, before you sleep, you hear it.

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Ellen McGrath Smith teaches at the University of Pittsburgh. Her poetry has appeared in the *New York Times*, *American Poetry Review*, *Talking Writing*, *Los Angeles Review*, and other journals and anthologies. Her books include *Scatter, Feed* (Seven Kitchens, 2014) and *Nobody's Jackknife* (West End Press, 2015).

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