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## By Water, Fire, and Air

Colleen M. Webster

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*Colleen M. Webster*

## By Water, Fire, and Air

### I. Into the Waves

- 28 March 1941, River Ouse, Virginia Woolf commits suicide

One stone, two, three, and more  
to weigh down the pockets  
match the burden of my body--  
yet each brings relief, lifts  
guilt from my frame  
as cool, wet, roundness calms  
my fingers, curving around  
their promise.

One war simmers behind me  
and no words are enough  
to ward off a second.

Leonard, I must go  
where no voices ring my ears  
and I can empty my head  
with the void of water.

I need a slippery place where  
no bomb makes a noise,  
no lovers see the sky  
lowering its head as I sink  
from view, through water,  
to sandy bottom where no  
dead men can find me.

II. Through the Flames

-10 March 1948, Asheville Hospital, NC, Zelda Fitzgerald dies

Though I am painting, giving color  
to Bible verse and meaning, I know  
these oranges and greys are not  
of my making.

Smoke filters in,  
wraps out through barred windows  
-Paris, New York swirl  
through soot mist, shrieks of hysterical  
dancers and drinkers crushing my ears.

Women all around me  
dance, arms in loose hair  
skirts wavering bare knees  
and I strain to hear music.

Then, from the corner, Scott beckons  
and I realize we will waltz again  
colors exploding around us  
tearing away this drab world  
to give back open spaces and  
the searing heat of release.

III. In the Oven

-11 February 1963, London, Sylvia Plath commits suicide

Only thirty and already weighted  
with one philandering husband who blooms  
in other women's arms  
while my two children nurse  
on no confidence.

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My flat is empty of grownup voices,  
tea whistles for one, dirty dishes  
clank in the sink.

But the gasman is calling  
from the street and I hear salvation  
in his tones.

Yes, we need some.

I will show him the way,  
as he has shown me mine, take the dark  
quiet of my kitchen,  
my little space where I am left  
to shrink to domesticsize,  
mother/wife body wrenched  
to a head bristling with words.

Here I kneel,  
head bowed to leave,  
one breath, two, three and more.