

Years of This · *Maria Flook*

It's like beginning small, the business
is marriage. First they buy the sign
and stack the shelves.
Her legs are long and cool
as fluorescent lights.
She sits aglow at the cash register
or with the adding machine in her lap.

People will buy anything sold in pairs.

Years of this and they buy real estate.
He builds the house and adds on and adds
on. On the patio, the children wiggle
their toes in wet cement, practicing
the names they will die with.

She is still adding and subtracting,
the lines in her palms do not lengthen
or multiply. The wrinkle in her womb
becomes the final namesake.

They started with nickels, dimes, animal
hungers. First he mowed the lawn,
she weeded. Then the gardener came
three times a week.
Now from their condominium window
a final geranium can be seen above traffic.
Its bloom tight pink
like an infant's fist behind glass.
They imagine their children returning, repentant.
All of them religious and sad.