

My Mother's See-Through Blouse *Jim Daniels*

1969. I was thirteen. My parents
had planned a rare night out—
my oldest brother babysitting
the rest of us.

My mother emerged from their bedroom
in a see-through blouse,
her plain white bra
clearly visible.

What was she thinking? To wake up
my father's numb shuffle, I guess.

What was she thinking?
I couldn't look at her.
My father looked up,
jumped, spilled his coffee.

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My mother flushed
then paled
trying to keep
from crumbling.

My father didn't yell
he paced and shook his head
he opened his mouth
he closed his eyes
he made fists.

He sent us to our rooms.
What are you thinking?
He asked her.

I didn't know things were
that bad. My father was never home.
They were both thirty-five.

I can pile up the facts.
She cried.
They went nowhere.
We never saw the blouse again.
It was rose-colored.

My mother had one of her
dizzy spells—she lay in bed
all weekend.

My father made us pancakes
the next morning
and they weren't bad.

He didn't say much.
Kept looking at his watch.
Your mother's sick, he said
and we knew.

Through the cracked door
I saw him sitting
on the side of their bed.
I couldn't see her.
Nobody said a thing.

Something might have
happened. But the next day,
it was back to work, and overtime.

Someone had to cook
and clean and it was
my mother.

Who loved her?
We all did. I lay sleepless
that night, wanting her
normal. I didn't want
to see-through.

Your mother gave us
a scare, my father said.
I nodded and ate my pancakes,
guzzling my milk
to get the dry pieces down.