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Jane

Author: Deborah Leslie
Year: [Friendship](#)

Jane is my friend.

Her rebellious orange frizz
blazes around a face as white as winter’s breath.
She moves carefully with skimmed-milk limbs,
rubbing herself warm, lips frosted with blue,
a seedling planted out of season.
Trapped in a jacket that doesn’t fit,
her sleeves catch halfway up her speckled arms.

At playtime, Jane isn’t asked to join in,
breathless and weak
and different –
like me,
the kid dropped into unfamiliar soil,
with a borrowed family,
and a puddle brown coat
made for growth.

We sit on the sidelines, Jane and me.
Knees up to our chins, we observe
the bright, screaming heart of the day,
unwrapping sweeties like secrets,
content with our snapping origami fortune tellers.
We trace messages with a finger on our backs,
tuning out the puerile playground names
that skim the edges of every game.

In another life, two young women meet
on a rain-lashed festive street.
Under a window’s bleeding Christmas lights,
we greet the kids we used to be, hug the memory tight.
Jane has some place she needs to be,
splashes into an impatient taxi
recalling: 'You were always good to me.'

One grey day, the obituaries tell me Jane has died.
My chest grips at the echo of her words,
and I wish I’d told her that I’d needed
her as much as she did me –
childhood friends, in a moment in time,
with a hole in their hearts
that no one could see.

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