

THE SPOON RIVER Poetry Review

Kay Murphy

Good Friday in the Dead Land

Two days after my son's funeral, desperate,
I attend my religious sister's church. Perhaps,
after all, I am part of what is not myth:
the grieving Mary, the dead son mutilated.
Two hours pass without utterance of her name

and, therefore, mine. I am taken down
to a river where my minister brother-in-law
stands with his pants rolled up and tips
the sin-dead back in one arm, pinches their nostrils
closed so they can be born again, die, be born again.

The river's name is Dead River. I ask twice.
It's in Michigan, just outside of Marquette.
A dead river, just like in other stories
about the dead. Where sometimes a divine wind
buries the body. Like it did for Antigone's brother.

My father, who has just had a stroke, sits
in the front row in a lawn chair where the eager
believers have placed him, convinced they can convert
my parents, myself, all atheists. He swats the horse flies
biting his ankles. *Fucking flies! Fucking flies!*

he keeps growling while my mother tries to shush him.
He never does say my son's name again, although
he loves him as he never can his daughters. Once
when we show him a family photo to help him
remember names, he points: *Someone's missing.*