

Billie Travalini

To My Quaker Grandmother

All I ever wanted was to be like you,
To have a strong back and a strong mind,
And do that magic thing you always did
Whenever you looked someone straight
In the eye and knew when *not* to talk.

At thirteen I was eager to please,
Eager to see March's final snowfall gone
And cherry blossoms show up along
The Brandywine the same way they
Showed up every April, sweet-smelling
Petals blowing this way and that, reminding
Me of the sweet-smelling confetti my sister
Once made out of pink construction paper
She soaked in Evening in Paris perfume.

I didn't need Paris back then.
You told me that the Brandywine
Was the most beautiful place
In the whole wide world
And I believed you.

You also told me that silence
Can be more powerful than words.
And I believed that, too. I could see
The power of silence, not in the river,
But in the faces of the giant rocks
That held the river up and the ground down
Without asking for a thing.

"They sure are beautiful," you said.
I wanted to say something
Important, maybe something about
How George Washington might have
Seen those same rocks on his way
To the Battle of the Brandywine.
I almost said it, too, but just then
A school of sunfish swam between
The rocks, and, like pure magic,
I swallowed my words just in the nick of time.