

BURIAL*Deborah Golub*

My father always said, Don't offer but don't deny,
that is, our religion, which I took as his
fear or shame—what he wanted me to feel as well—

though not what happened after Donna, the only other
kid my age in that archipelago, asked.
I answered, Jewish, and we went right back

to sanctifying the grave we'd just made for a mouse.
But the next day, Donna stared at me,
my head to be exact, the crown,

and with her fingers probed my scalp. For horns,
she said. Which was her father's fear, I guess,
and why from that day forth she couldn't come close.

I don't know what Donna made of what he'd taught her
that night. But I, at home the evening after, wept.
Not from any fear or shame. It was some sudden

crack into a great and wild grief, made
worse when my own father's voice, as if
rending cloth, proclaimed, Get used to it!

Two fathers, each guarding his child from the whole
world he saw in the other. But, oh, we'd held
our funeral sublimely on that forest floor

with twigs and flowers, a matchstick box with moss,
and a solemn word or two for the mouse
from each of us.

THE DOG

—for Gerald Stern

Deborah Golub

You're right, there were signs "No Jews or dogs," yours in Miami, mine Fire Island, though the one I remember added "coloreds," or was it "Catholics," I'm not sure, I was frozen on the Jewish part, me, and how all of us on that list had gotten junked with beasts. No one in a hurry did it. Some official must have lettered the sign so beautifully, precisely. Then they hung the lot of us next to their padlocked gate on their chain-link fence.

What difference would it make: a yellow star, crayoned on a scrap of paper and stitched so neatly to one of my grandmother's dusting cloths. Who cared that a kid snuck quickly, quietly, over the line by way of the beach and, once inside, tied that band around her impure arm and paraded, paraded, paraded. Just try, you bastards! Did I even know that word? And did anyone even notice except, maybe, the dog that ran at me from someone's house. And who had snuck him in, anyway? And was he a guard dog or one of my new family, happy to see me?