

Anne Britting Oleson

My Mother on the Stairs

She was dying. I was seventeen
and did not understand
that or much of anything else.

She came up slowly, her steps
labored, her breathing, too.
My mother had not come upstairs
in months, but had become
the presence on the couch.

To my left, the window
and the black night.
My face reflected back, pale,
ghostlike, tears and rain all one.

Then, she stood in the doorway,
the landing all she could manage.
She did not reach out to me.
You don't, she said, have to marry him.

Anne Britting Oleson has been published widely. Her two chapbooks, *The Church of St. Materiana* and *The Beauty of It*, came out in 2007 and 2010 respectively. Another book, *Counting the Days*, is scheduled for release in November.