

A. E. Stallings

The Blue Balloon

'That night I'd padded to the children's room
As mothers do, to drink the sound of sleep,
But stopped in the doorway and could not go in.
Something stood, watching them, the blue balloon
That rose there like a disembodied head
At human height—it had lost half its lift—
Or if it had a body, one string-thin
That hung limp as a noose and trailed the ground.
It was perhaps a draft that made it swivel
Slowly, as a head might turn, and look
Or rather, since it had no eyes, regard
Me where I stood stopped on the chilly threshold.
Daytime, of course, it was a blue balloon
Half out of helium, halfway between
The ceiling and the floor. I seized its throat
And scissored all the buoyance out of it.
Later, when the lights went out—for just
Two seconds maybe—and there was a noise
That thumped from deep inside the ice box—well
My heart clutched also—the sound like a fist
Pounding for release from under a lid.
When it stopped I laughed at how I'd been unnerved
By a freak of surging current. Later when
I lay down in my dark room on the bed
And waited for the headache to dissolve,
The bitter chalk of pills still in my mouth,
I wept and did not dare open my eyes,
As nothing held my hand, and held my hand.'