

SERAPHINA

by Maria Karachalios

*At times, I glimpse her at the market,
ducking beneath the bulk
of her mother's purse.
Her little feet scurry back and forth
to the sway of her mother's form.*

*With ivory fingers, she reaches
for a cookie, grasping it
so gingerly it nearly drops.*

*I've spied her at the school yard,
within the confines of the fence,
gripping the straps of her backpack.
As she watches the others
shriek and chase,
she digs the heel of her Mary Janes
into the earth.*

*Mostly I spot her in the dark,
after closing my eyes for slumber.
Knowing she's coming
like a far-off train,
yet to rumble past.*

*I wait for the stinking black,
cold and hollow,
my heart a gallop,
my breath caught,
and then she is here.*

*Panic.
Bound.
A fear so loud
I cannot sit nor think.
They are sleeping and
I am pacing with blind fright.*

*I turn on every light,
but it's no use.
I am alone with the dread,
with the rot inside me.*

*And here is the part
I wish I had understood.
A small voice whispers
for the comfort of my father.
But father cannot comfort
a demon.*

*Time has slipped away,
and I believed I'd spend my days
cloaked in black.
Yet on an ordinary day,
tending to ordinary things,
she noticed me.*

*Clearing my porch of
children's sticks and rocks
and wilted flowers,
I hear a soft whirring,*

*and there she is,
across the street,
pedalling feverishly,
her auburn curls bouncing.*

*She turns her precious head
and sees me.
For a fleeting moment,
her eyes flicker.
Her legs stop churning,
and she glides past me slowly.*

*I never saw her again
after that day.
But I search for her
at the bustling market,
hiding among the totes and bags
of mothers.*

*And at night, I ponder
that tiny voice in my head.
Because now I understand
that voice
belonged to God.*

*If I had leapt
wildly away from it all,
perhaps my story would have ended
with a back-breaking halt.
But now I've realized that voice,
those words,
were there to guide me.*

