

The New Criterion

Poems October 2021

To Dervla Murphy's mother, in a time of quarantine

by Katie Hartsock

An invalid for thirty years,
bookended by piles of pages
you couldn't turn, concerned with tasks
beyond your reach, like islands

of dust on curtain lace—*castaway*,
castaway—you got mean.
Who wouldn't, when the dream where you
can't move won't end, when no door

leads outside. What house is built
for that. My mother's feet
surprise me when I cut her toenails.
She still walks but not that far,

hasn't traveled much and yet she'll say,
"Let's go, I know what walls
look like." On bumpy roads I push
a stroller built with shocks,

suspension, real wheels we keep inflated.
No All-Terrain Pro
or Revolution Flex 2.0
for you, who pushed your pram

up into the Knockmealdown Mountains
on walks alone with the baby,
the year that would be your last to walk.
It was talked about.

It wasn't done: a mother taking off
to wildflowers, vistas,
ridges, freshest unbound air.
But you did. And when you died

Dervla rode her bike to India.
She stayed inside with you
so long, until you could wander
again, so far, with her.

—*Katie Hartsock*

Katie Hartsock's second poetry collection is *Wolf Trees* (Able Muse Press).

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