

WHAT I WOULD HAVE TOLD YOU

Poetry

Anthony Abbott

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I hold them in my heart, these, girls, twins,
eighteen, about to graduate from school,
home alone at night, with their brother,
twenty-one, I think. Mother in Nicaragua
or Guatemala, visiting family. My friend,

I want so much to tell you how the storm
came upon them, a giant with plodding feet,
crushing everything in its path, and the girls
frightened by the terrible whip of the
night wind, the crash of thunder—the girls

went to their brother's room, held each other
in his bed while the storm swirled and the
lightning struck and the huge tree toppled
--not on their own bed, as they had feared
but on the brother's bed where they lay—

killed instantly the paper said. You see
I want to pick up the phone and hear
the sweet silence of you listening to me.
I want to tell you how the girls sought
this one place of safety, and rightly so

and how it offends my sight, this thing—
all of them, of course—Jolplin, Tuscaloosa,
St. Louis—all of them day after day—
but these two girls—twins, about to graduate
from school. I name them—Leticia and Celia—

what I really wanted was to tell you the story
to look at you and ask—what can we say
about this? I wanted you to comfort me,
to tell me it was all right, though it was not
and never could be, never, never.

Perhaps we would have talked about God.
Perhaps I would have cursed or wept
or shouted at the empty sky. Perhaps
you would have touched my hand and told
me of the blue-green veil of mystery.

That's the point, isn't it, my friend. It's not
about the girls or God or justice in the universe.
It's about the flat black emptiness without you.
“Let the days go by,” you said in the dusk
out there. I can't. I look for you everywhere.