

SYDNEY LEA

Seams Sew Easy

in mem. Ruth Day Bean (1919–2004)

Just before she died, Ruthie told us she'd tried to phone
but "couldn't see to punch the buttons." Doubtless her glaucoma,
known to her as *galcoma*, as her other ailment—one of the many—
was *emsemo*. She hadn't been able to breathe, she was scared,
she wanted to call
"because I felt just as though I was going to die." She wanted to see
her nephew Leon, home on leave from what she called *Juac*.

Oh, those neologisms, the *Aridonnick* mountains, the *plascit* bags,
and once—to confoundment she took with her to her grave—a
sore wrist
that her longtime doctor called a *ruffled lotus*. Or so she claimed.
Then Ruthie did die,
and the world seemed oddly other now without this woman in it,
after all our years of loving her, no matter we laughed behind
her back,

at her macular degeneration, say, which in her words
turned into *immaculate de-odination*. Use your fingers,
your unruffled fingers, and count: count how few there have
been in your life
as in ours of whom it might be said what we said: "She didn't have
a mean bone in her body." Or: "She never uttered an evil
word about anyone else." All that was true as could be of Ruth,
who wouldn't even condemn those vultures at the fuel company
who stole from her government heating assistance until my
brilliant lawyer
wife ran them out of business. You could say those things of
Ruthie, who cared
for all our kids off and on for three decades and more, and the
kids, from the firstborn man to the

twelve-year-old child: they wondered, too, at a Ruthless world,
and we wept as one, and I sat in the pew and I thought, How
good this sadness.

How much we loved her. How this sadness is real and our own
and we will save it,
and save Ruthie forever, who must at least now feel no less safe
than she did
for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Juac. And when it fell,
the last clod, that brilliant lawyer wife looked more lovely than ever,
and the children more admirable, fine. And I drove the
youngest up to Woodsville,
to "Seams Sew Easy," the fabric and sewing shop in that
hardscrabble town—

where once, an ancient neighbor told me, forty trains arrived
every day, and the mills were active, and no box store
threatened, no video mart flashed posters and no
notions shop would ever be called something corny.
The girl wanted to make herself a simple skirt, her first.
The woman who minded the store was patient, patient. As I killed
time by the window and I looked out, the sunlight of early spring

or late winter, whatever you wanted to call it, shied off the sooty
deadbeat granite buildings while the patient, decent woman guided
our daughter and fingered her cloths and laid out beautiful,
colorful patterns.

I thought, with an ease deep down in my bones that comes,
great Dickinson tells us,
after great pain, and ammoniac odor of weeping still in my head:
I thought, as if the thought were deep as well, *This life is all right.*