

Asterism

a pattern of stars of similar brightness

When I was small, I would walk with my mother
to the grocery store, where if we met a neighbor

Mom would lay her hand on my shoulder and say
this is my number five. I guess it was easier

to refer to her children by number
—there were ten of us after all.

It wasn't that she didn't love us, she did
—there were just too many little hands

with too much want. My siblings called me Diney
and for a long time, other folks tried too

though it was hit or miss on how they heard it
—Dina Dinah or Tiny.

Now most everyone knows me as Diane
though I know that could change too

and I am always eager
to see who I next become.

My girls baptized me Mother
—that fit like a flannel gown

growing even cozier
when they added the honorific, Grand.

And there was a time, I worked in Tennessee
—the people there knew me only by title.

Now in my attic are old letters
addressed to every version of me

each a star on my celestial sphere
—the constellation of a contoured life.

Diane Melby

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