

Dead Butterfly

By Ellen Bass

For months my daughter carried
a dead monarch in a quart mason jar.
To and from school in her backpack,
to her only friend's house. At the dinner table
it sat like a guest alongside the pot roast.
She took it to bed, propped by her pillow.

Was it the year her brother was born?
Was this her own too-fragile baby
that had lived—so briefly—in its glassed world?
Or the year she refused to go to her father's house?
Was this the holding-her-breath girl she became there?

This plump child in her rolled-down socks
I sometimes wanted to haul back inside me
and carry safe again. What was her fierce
commitment? I never understood.
We just lived with the dead winged thing
as part of her, as part of us,
weightless in its heavy jar.

Poem copyright © 2007 by Ellen Bass and reprinted from "The Human Line," 2007, by permission of Copper Canyon Press, www.coppercanyonpress.org.