

## **Cradling the Fiasco**

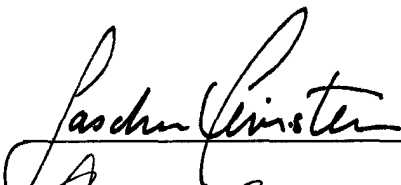
Presented to the faculty of Lycoming College  
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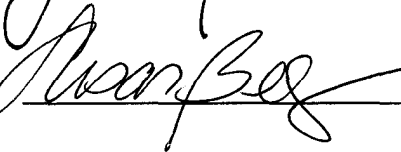
Lynn Marie Detwiler

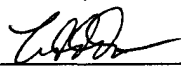
Lycoming College


April 8, 2011

Approved by:

  
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## **Cradling the Fiasco**

Poems by Lynn Marie Detwiler

Fiasco (n.): a bulbous, long-necked, straw-covered bottle for wine

Fiasco (n.): a complete failure

*for my family  
as we travel through this continuum of breaking  
and fusing.*

## CONTENTS

### I

Falling from Christianity	8
Swans	10
From the Greenhouse Window	11
24 and Breakable	13
Depression Glass	14
Trousseau	15
Ignorance	17
<i>Kristallnacht</i> and Now	18
Our Hands, Opus Palladianum	19
Crystallophones	22
Reminder	23
Waiting for the Burst	24
Sea Glass	25

## II

Facing La Recoleta	27
Pantheistic Celebration	31
Van Gogh Plays God	33
Broken Minnesang	36
Fish Bowl Vision	37
Semi-Translucent	39
Cradling the Fiasco	41
Young Cranberries	43
Abella: Beekeeper	45
Stained Arizona Sky	46
Shiny Surfaces	48
Treasures	50
Mother-Daughter Medium	52
Funny Jar in the Corning Museum of Glass	53

**I**

## Falling from Christianity

I chased you through twilight's  
heavy branches—the pathway lit gold  
by suspended lanterns—flashing,

flying. We cupped our hands to the air,  
praising the nightlife,  
trying to pressure the fireflies

into the pale, green glass. When we captured the light  
we felt whole. Knees, then chest to the ground,  
examining like scientists—

shaking and then veiling the container  
in a thicket to test their desires  
of finding love. But we kept them too long,

accepted the role of murderers,  
decided they weren't as beautiful in piles  
at the bottom of the Mason jar.

By mid-August, we became the wild priests  
of summer nights. We held them by wings  
and squeezed their abdomens, anointing

our foreheads with a smear of guts.  
Pores glowed neon and my skin burned,  
but we wore the glory of the seraphim.



We left the dim creatures twitching,  
their mates shivering in bushes and on branches,  
waiting for the stillness.

Emptied, exhausted, we sat on my back porch,  
tipped our heads back to see the untouchable—  
flecks and black space—and began to weep.

Swans

Weighed down by the fluff of tulle,  
    bony bodies stretch their lines  
        until you see through their skin—  
blue blood ruled by a silent hum,  
    a piano playing nothing incessantly,  
        like broken music boxes with figurines.

Calves that used to bulge—  
    now twigged and bowed,  
        toes bruised and crooked,  
white architecture ridden with disease:  
    fishbone collars protruding from sallow flesh,  
        shoulder blades strained like featherless wings,  
always wanting flexibility,  
    wanting a higher arabesque,  
        wanting to be the prima.

They pin their chignons, waxing wisps,  
    necks strained to gaze at their own beauty,  
        ribs giving scaled texture to smooth torsos.

Warm-ups at the bar—arched back, a lump  
    of bones, dotted spine like hidden pearls.  
        And when they eat, they eat like swans  
picking at their tubers.

From the Greenhouse Window

White balloon

with a green string,  
waxen transformer—  
you're nothing

but food for bees,

stem rigid enough  
for children to pop  
your top off.

A ghost of moonlight,

a downy pinwheel scattering  
seeds like snow,  
your sphere could burst

on this windy night.

Your only good is to feed  
or fly away where nobody  
can touch you.

Eva, my friend,

you've become a recluse,  
blonde hair stuck to red  
lips, craving another hit.

You're loaded  
to take away the pain  
of his punch, so skinny  
I can see the blue  
in your wrists.  
Like a chameleon you blend  
when shoved in the corner.  
Don't leave me at midnight  
to wander that field  
of your mind.  
If only your cheeks  
were white and round  
as the dandelions  
you blow, you'd float  
back down so I  
could touch you.

24 and Breakable

*Dying is easy; it's living that scares me to death.*

—Annie Lennox

Dull slivers of blue-green eyes recede  
into sagging circles and heavy lids—fresh  
but frail, youth in youth's arms wilting  
like walls of paper stripes and rosettes.

The radio plays her dance of new life  
every morning after coffee, as she rests  
her infant against her collarbone. A toddler  
bobs at her right hand, buttons unclasped and messy,

blonde fuzz standing on end. One, two, three,  
and he buckles in rhythm with the song.  
A fraying dishrag dries his ruddy cheeks,  
and Annie begins her refrain, *Walking on . . .*

Shivers shake her baby awake—  
shell-shocked from the wintry, long  
breaths through rotted sills. Over toothless  
screams, the radio echoes, *Walking on . . .*

No choice, with eyes half-full, but to rush  
out of the room, child staggering past  
the quivering table, knocking bony elbows—  
her blue-necked bottles . . . *broken glass.*

Depression Glass

(Oklahoma, 1934)

Momma poured morning oats in bowls of dust,

while on the horizon thick black rollers

threatened to steal even our last breath.

Yellow Quaker box in hand, her disgust

pursed on her lips for company consolers,

'cause these "charity dishes" filled the depth

of our china cabinet. Transparent

rose, bright canary, and opaque milk were

my only source of color—gold beneath

cheap green glass, the poor man's emerald in

a time of fiscal death.

Trousseau

My breath in December is a hope chest,  
keeping stories and secrets until I release them—

ribbons of white streaming from my lips pour  
into your mouth. *I'm worried about our future.*

But your blithe kiss wanders  
from my cheek to bottom lip, trying to soothe me.

Our winter tradition is watching car windows,  
woven with ice, thaw like my mother's wedding lace,

dripping cool pearls down its bodice.

And time never lets you watch long before you must chisel

the windshield clear. A true lady waits inside.

Your '91 Cavalier runs louder than a purr

while I rub my warm fingertips on the pane, tracing  
an outline of your face. Even at home, diamond lines, necklaces,

form strands along the cedar railings and icicles  
fall from cracking gutters, breaking like collectable

china saucers. The streetlamps emit a false glow  
on our rundown apartment—shining stones

and a glittering blanket laid over the shingles.  
It's so cold outside I'm breathless.



## Ignorance

The branches they walk on are brittle  
with ice—tightropes strung across sunsets—  
but the cardinals never shiver or falter.

From the bedroom where I sleep alone,  
I've watched them mate in the skinny birch,  
a bright flutter of crimson and chestnut.

The black-masked male, the courtier,  
places seeds in her mouth, beak-to-beak,  
as we did with strawberries in our youth.

They sing a high, soft vibrato,  
a dissonant chord to our disgust  
with each other, our scornful remarks:

You called me *whore*. A red bullet  
crashed into my window that afternoon—  
a stinging sound, like your hand to my face.

*I only loved you because you're beautiful,*  
he said, breathing heavy like the red body  
stunned on the porch, eyes alert, but glassy.

*Kristallnacht* and Now

Above the roar  
                    of happy men in coats—  
the dissonant clang and burst.  
  Children  
in hospital dresses crossed billions  
of window rivers—dragged by arms,  
  choking,  
their slender, red feet muddied with the wet dust  
of Elohim. Holding their wrists, the crude  
men popped glass  
  like bubbles under thick boots,  
laughing with elitist lust.

You're no better. 3 a.m.,  
                            Irish temper—  
*you bastard*—it pulses through your fingertips,  
raises your eager hand  
  with a lust to strike.  
Again. Moonlight, puddled on the floor,  
shivers off heirlooms, anything breakable—  
  billions—  
fish scales under water—  
  to prove you want to  
and *can*  
                            draw blood, thrust my bag of bones, and bruise.  
Always a slamming door, quivering  
  satellites, and that grin.

Our Hands, Opus Palladianum

We were elementary school psychics,  
reading lines across our palms,  
predicting babies and death dates,  
crying when we realized life  
may be too short. We could never know

for sure just where creases stopped  
and started. The heart line—sliced  
by wrinkles, one cut for every true  
love: summer kisses and carnival rides.  
After recess I'd trace my fissures

as if I could draw my own life in skin,  
sheer porcelain allowing steel blue  
to glow from beneath the surface . . .  
Stained windows seemed so holy  
at early morning mass, kaleidoscopic

wall spots in rich, comforting colors.  
The complexion of too many saints  
caused stark white light to invade,  
leaving walls a jaundiced pearl.  
I always felt the glassy eyes

scan my place in the communion line,  
knowing if I had sinned  
too much that week. Every face  
that burned ivory sunlight  
washed me out to a marble statue.

Looking closer now, my skin has tiles,  
a mosaic of irregular shapes, shades  
of creamy tan, cracking with a bitter winter,  
branches split open to show my living color,  
red. I'm a million shards: my father,

mother, and sister. Our flesh is getting older,  
shriveling like our wilted passions.  
Daddy's hands hardened from weekend repairs,  
doors that will always squeak, cracking gutters.  
Fingernails blackened by soil,

knuckles caked, my father ages  
with his garden's diminishing yield.  
Momma's hands, too, are made of pain,  
exposed to dish water and scrub brushes,  
cooking meals three times a day. Her diamond,

my obsession, introduced me to her fingers,  
white and abrasive, my young touch playing healer.  
And my sister, once blessed with an artist's hands,  
defined by pastels and lead-smudged fingerprints,  
ruined by the starving artist syndrome, worries

of the "real" world. My painted handprints  
from kindergarten hang in the basement.  
I haven't grown much since. Lines run  
from my wrist to my palms to my fingers,  
writing a fractured autobiography.

## Crystallophones

My fingers glide over the chilled skeletons  
of wine vessels, creating friction,  
a symphony of discordant ringing—  
like hand bells at the Christmas service—guiding  
me into unfamiliar silence. The supernatural  
squeals of small bowls and the deep, smoothness  
of the bigger ones force maddening confessions  
and guilt onto the candlelit table, pouring  
incessant fears as steady as the resonance:  
*I'm afraid at every goodbye that I should've stayed  
just a little longer . . .* In the 1700's women in their frills,  
ringed by pearls and lace, swooned  
to the whining music of armonicars.  
Their husbands, the great composers  
of the decade, crippled by nervous fits,  
darkened chords by plucking strands  
of depression . . . Yet the silence  
in this cafe makes my hands tingle  
to create the wavering tones, layered rich  
like desserts, a thrum, then rapid gush  
of the estranged details: *What happens  
when I die? What happens if it's tomorrow?*

Reminder

*for Uncle Jim*

A piece of blown glass  
on burnished asphalt stops me,  
as though the breath in those synthetic  
pockets was a metaphor  
for life's boundaries,  
the final gasp of your ash-riddled lungs.

My breath hovers in the brisk air,  
then the diamond shards scatter  
underneath the weight of my boots—  
crunching and clinging . . .  
In the frailty of ninth grade, what broke me  
were my mother's eyes,

glazed to emphasize their golden streaks,  
though I already knew from classroom whispers—  
*How sad . . . He was such a good man.*  
Mother's face loosened  
my grip on the leather-strapped bag,  
and I collapsed to cool linoleum.

Not wanting to hold her hand  
I pressed my palms into the floor  
and, for the first time, wept out loud  
surrounded by my friends, his students,  
who watched as mother and daughter  
fiercely gripped each other.

## Waiting for the Burst

Icy blackberries suspended in a warm glass—  
an electric shock to lips and tongue,  
condensation slithering, forming less than clear  
circles like frost on windows. Dripping,  
glittering, swelling until the burst—  
shattering half-moons and sticky grit of sap  
bleeding into Mother's cashmere. Above the clank  
of casual diners, her temper swelled  
like the tumbler: *Get me the manager!*  
Delicate sounds like little silver bells  
clinked as she stood, purple hands bramble-numb,  
steeping crass remarks. In the silent hum,  
I could only look into her eyes—icy black  
without reflection—and wonder  
if she'd ever admit she needs help caring  
for Dad, the grandparents, herself . . .  
I waited for the inevitable burst: succumbing  
to images of steam on hospital windows, the broken  
responses to a diagnosis, the premature wrinkles  
on my father's face. She always tries to fix what she can't  
see: lumps, black-violet within his cold body, while I warm  
my glass with heavy breaths, bursts, kindling tears.



Sea Glass

I found a faceless Mary in foaming green,  
beaten smooth in the froth

and pull

and hiss,

the dip and twirl, the sinking. Ivory-blue abyss  
ever-issuing her to the site of ancient Argentines,  
palms open, where I bent to wipe the grit from her veil.  
At the birth of day she gleamed and made me covet  
her, nature's figurine

stripped of enamel,

buffed

to a salt-frosted ghost I'd place bedside—shells  
and abandoned ware flaunted by white wash  
walls. In warp of moonlight, while I grind my teeth,  
she looms, makes me tense and writhe in satin sheets  
until I have been warmed

like kettle milk—

sun-flushed.

In self-reproach, I churn Exodus: "a wound for a wound,"  
while yearning for the rush

and hush

of surf to carry me

away, remake me immaculate. *Oh Mary,*  
*tumble me smooth until I am bound.*

**II**

Facing La Recoleta

*Buenos Aires, 2010*

*I. Requiescat in Pace*

The wishes of this stone-blown little girl  
are gone, yet she waits on the yellow-pink  
globe of stained glass turning mother-of-pearl  
blue. No blood runs here, just stone—dried out ink  
that once scribed a city. Wing-tipped shadows  
slant upward, revealing the thin pathway

to cockroaches, spray-paint, and these fallow  
grounds. Mausoleums, stretched tall, decay  
into the rust of sky. Granite chambers,  
mere inches apart, make me walk heavy  
in my bones, as if I've been bound by pine  
trees and coffins. Broken walkways levy

death on us, and behind the barred, gray walls,  
the Virgin Mother etched in window jewels.

## II. The Viewing

Mary's face, and I'm back in Johnsonburg,  
prayer card gripped tight between my thumbs. His corpse  
dressed in hunting flannel, the lipstick-hard  
mouth pinned to smirk—the gold, velvet lamps warped

his image, and mine. I was only ten,  
and forced to take my place on the kneeler  
where I gaped, pretending to say Amens  
and Our Fathers. So close to his skin, more

than I'd like to be, perhaps more than I  
should have been. They assumed I was grieving  
my great uncle, but I was terrified  
of becoming a death doll, of the seething

sour smell so unlike my home. The faux  
lilies, the silence of lace and pillows . . .

III. *I will return and I will be millions.*

—Eva Perón

Her golden expression convinces me  
there's an unseen warmth in these hazy clouds.  
She's crowned for motherhood, haloed with down  
for final rest. She's the soul behind He,  
like our affectionate Evita turned  
activist from radio actress, laid  
behind this marble door with floral braids  
of illusive stone, weaved with bulbs infirm  
as velvet. The silhouettes at sunset  
sprawl and flatten by the gates, ceramic  
bowls of milk left for the smoldering eyes  
that squint, orange and hungry—feral cats  
given sparkling china stars and planets.  
Tourists admire as kittens lap up the skies.

#### IV. Reflection

Tawny cats, still starving, bury their heads  
in straw, below women of copper green  
covered in fruitless vines marking their dead.

Stone dogs guard the nursing mother screened  
in ivy—one child clinging to her breast,  
the firstborn already overgrown. Hung

by cypress branches, a reflection recessed  
into sky: taken off the cross, a young

Christ. Is it strange to believe that concrete  
angels have feathers? Leaving earthly margins  
behind as He did, I will let go, be free

from fearing the intangible, lend skin

and my image to these windows. For I

realize that I'm young, but not too young to die.

## Pantheistic Celebration

—after Louis Comfort Tiffany

Magnolias rise from a tomb in Brooklyn,  
wet fingerlings stretched wide, reconciling  
with creamy pockets. Royal morning thins,  
and glides into the heavens, gold clinging  
to wet fingerlings stretched wide, reconciling  
with mottled mountains. Irises, molten,  
roll up for the heavens, the gold clinging,  
petal tips sacrifice an aged red-violet—bold  
as mottled mountains. Irises, molten  
with newborn lilac and traces of rose,  
burn their tips, bleeding jewel tones. The bold  
sprigs of emerald and banks of mud life glow  
like newborn cheeks, round with traces of rose.  
Land parts for the river, a serpent, watery,  
darting from emerald banks with a pulsing glow,  
tapering, yet pooling—a placid plea,

before land will part for the serpent. Water  
with a sheen the color of sunny icebergs  
flows into the valley, pools, placid water—  
a feathery gray-blue—mockingbirds  
with cream pockets. The royal morning thins  
as magnolias rise from a tomb in Brooklyn.



Van Gogh Plays God

—after *Starry Night Over the Rhone*

An absinthe-induced skyline

imposes perfection in a blur.

Burdened with a modest red

at the bottom of the woman's dress,

she clutches her lover's arm.

Their hunched shadows are sharp and

sturdy in the strokes of wind—

their hardships, over.

Glassy royal waters roll, inconstant,

as pillars of light ascend

from his green-bronze

and stretch toward a bruised sky. Stars

fizzle in oily smudges. Yellow-orange blotches

of town light shroud labeled buildings.

until they become peaks of indigo mountains.

And the line the lovers walk on—  
a fine tip separating the ideal from the real—  
created for them by the shaking hands  
of a man painting in layers,  
always dissatisfied.  
Don't be fooled by his insanity,  
his wishes that the world were this pristine.  
Just look at his life:  
anxiety tore at his flesh  
with a shot to the head—  
like a subject of his own paintings,  
a cornflower-blue body  
limp over strands of copper wheat.  
And yet, who wouldn't choose  
to paint one's life over again  
every time a loved one is lost  
or the hope that gold will save, fades?  
In those last loveless hours,

he wished to grasp someone,  
to stroke a woman's pearl white skin—  
his stars in the black of midnight.

Broken Minnesang

—after an untitled painting at the Met

Flow blue china slivers

mosaic the dining room floor—  
anxious fingertips of a housewife.

Cobalt flowers omitting petals and stems,  
half-houses, little silver birds without legs . . .

Fifty-three beats per second

ruptured on canvas—winged texture  
of oil on oil, crude black and white shards  
with flimsy glimmers of living indigo.

Spilled milk plaster and fluttering—on dirty floors . . .

## Fish Bowl Vision

All we know is trapped in glass impressions—  
cystic sea bulbs pulsing with translucent hearts.  
Curiosity has no consequence, needs no discretion.

Through media screens we form real-world obsessions—  
drink, smoke, sex, curse, steal. Pixels are fine art.  
All we know is trapped in glass impressions.

Museum cases, poised, beckon no questions.  
Fingerprinted revolutions and innovations impart  
no need for curiosity. The consequence is our discretion.

We've replaced sweet, stale leather bindings in recession  
with page-free technology counterparts.  
Even literature's trapped in glass impressions

instead of dusty shelves. Thinking we must capture expression  
through the fisheye lens, everyone's now photo-smart.  
When curiosity has no consequence, we lose discretion

in choices and venial confessions—  
how we've raised our families, shunned our God. Chaos starts  
with what we know, trapping in glass impressions  
all curiosity, the consequence of no discretion.

## Semi-Translucent

My neighbor read poetry to me  
by a wall of windows—barely limitless—  
chandelier spots mingling with stars,  
oak legs superimposed on the backyard forest—  
a portrait to hang on each branch.

I forget his name. Curving towards the earth  
in a recliner like crushed velvet, he wrote new life—  
his daughter, his granddaughter. A little too  
sentimental, though his wrinkling  
forehead illustrated a story I admired more.

A fragile glare from above his spectacles  
urged me to critique pieces he created in hospitals,  
in factories. I'd nod politely. He'd pause to search,  
scan the outside, when I could only see a never-ending room  
with the sky's lambent ivory platter hovering over his bald

head. Maybe he was looking further than I, waiting  
for his daughter, at three feet tall, to materialize  
in the reflection that had stayed the same for 45 years—  
Warhol's empty bottles on soda shop counters,  
waiting for copper-oxide nickels.

From the inside, he couldn't touch color—  
breathing green or crooked brown—  
but he always tried . . .  
In glass cages, old birds perch and gaze  
and wait for more.



Cradling the Fiasco

*For Adam*

The perfumes of velvet-skinned grapes  
linger in the slender emerald necks  
of potbelly Bocksbeutel and the plump lips  
of ports. In this humidity, their smooth  
bodies stay cool enough that I press  
them against my cheek—and I'm drunk

without a taste, though I may be drunk  
off memories . . . the rows of grapes  
and vines in Argentina, purple pressed  
lipstick of Malbec, or that black-necked  
bottle's lustrous curves. My skin's smoother  
than the taste, or so my boyfriend says, lips

numbly pressing against my lips,  
his green eyes glassy, "love-drunk,"  
but I think it's the bottles that cause this smooth  
talk. I'm fixed on the one with stains like grape  
petals, lucid and dripping down the neck—  
it's almost a work of art, and I'm impressed

with my collection, round shadows pressed  
onto the wall—framed: Bordeaux-colored lips  
of the *Girl with the Pearl Earring*, chardonnay necks.  
These are the things pompous drunks  
confer in bistros, but I'm alone in my room dreaming of grapes,  
glass, and you. I'm no drunk. I just like the smoothness

of a 1974 Inglenook bottle. I try to smooth  
the slightly yellowed and wrinkled label, feel its weight press  
down on my palm. I like to cradle the fiasco that held Tuscan grapes,  
pretending I've been to Italy, seen the experienced lips  
of glass blowers round the flask's bottom—drunk  
off their own craft. The purple blemishes on thick-necked

bottles remind me of nights spent necking  
when I was younger. Now, I have someone to smooth  
my hair, drive me home when I'm drunk  
and giggling too much, someone to press  
tightly in my arms, and to tell me I have beautiful lips,  
though they're often chapped like raisins, not fleshy grapes.

Our kiss is Gustav Klimt's: necks yearning, pressing  
our smooth bodies into a scene of tangled gold, my lips  
in a drunken dream—the color of juicy grapes.

## Young Cranberries

Like ivory lights on bushes  
after a protective coat of snow,  
the flimsy branches glazed from impact,  
and the drops of early winter stilled  
in a mid-air rain. My vision was sheltered  
by a thin film after my head hit the ground.  
I lay plastered to the glossy land  
in a downy blue snowsuit. Mother's muted  
laughter continued through the picture window  
as the neighbor's dog chased me  
up the icy drive. I left my scarlet mitten digging  
into the plow's pile, almost persistent . . .  
Harvesters of buoyant cranberry fields  
flood and sand their crop to protect  
sweetness from frost. Some years they rise  
in triumphant red to speckle the waters

and match autumn's trees. But if there's too much sand,  
or too much rain prevents pollination  
of the honeybees, the yield can sour  
and bruise like skin, humanity unripened . . .  
A jolt through my bones, harsh impact of mirror  
and flesh, left me broken—black, blue, and yellow.  
Wrapped up in a plush blanket, I no longer wanted  
to play in the snow. Inside there's steam to veil  
and protect me from the hardening frost.

Abella: Beekeeper

She folds molten sunshine—honey dipper  
of stainless steel rolling to balance sacs  
of glass. Dewdrop sweat, her fiery glitter  
on tangerine cheeks, grows round and fat,  
hand-blown and ready to shatter. She breathes  
shape into the opaque and transparent,  
coercing red-hot nectar, and squeezing  
vases, bulbs, and jars. Wafting from the pit,  
hand-me-down scents . . .

waking to warm sugar.

Abella licks honey from glossy combs:

*No, no cariño, espera.* She stirs  
miel and caramel in her barrio home  
only on holidays—a recipe,  
a secret straight from the keeper of bees.



into royal blue—  
then trembles,  
garbles his speech.  
*I remember when that was me.*  
But now he's in the glory,  
waking dreams  
that Elder Brother has gifted under  
a slivered moon.  
I stumble  
over the land to get to him.  
Guttural  
screaming echoes deep in his  
bronze chest.  
I hold his thrashing head  
until he ceases  
and his black eyes water.  
He hastens toward the village,  
and I follow, my pounding  
footsteps  
less urgent, like the patient  
drum  
underneath rhythmic stories,  
chanted around  
tongues—  
wild and orange.

## Shiny Surfaces

I once saw myself in soup bowls  
and blank TV screens,  
in patent leather shoes  
and Christmas bulbs.  
Blinded by life's shiny rarities—  
my face in pots and pans,  
grandpa's in a picture frame—  
because a child works in this way.

Twenty years later, I'm surrounded  
by quick breaths from infants,  
the warmth of their peach-fuzz heads,  
widening eyes in undefined color.  
Reaching for the sterling  
charms around my neck, they guard  
the faux crystals and pearls, fascinated  
by reflective vision.

Permanent scars and blotchy freckles  
cover my pale skin, an after-sun  
appearance, chlorine or summer  
sweat's exposure. As a teenager



I finally learned erasers couldn't rid me  
of my flaws, but everything magnified  
under the bathroom glass, lights  
or adolescence warping self-image.

In a room full of plastic toys, children  
prefer a mirror, kitchen utensils,  
car keys, and ceiling fans. Their world  
expands in luster. When I look  
into these objects, I see unfinished metal,  
pieces of a practical world.  
But their eyes are burnished, glittering . . .  
beholding raw beauty for the first time.

## Treasures

Papa prefers to taste the sea,

while I collect the shiny souvenirs.

His back is hunched in pursuit

of hard, wet bulges under dampened sand;

shells like glassy half-bottles under burning

daylight. When I'd bend to fill my pail with round,

foaming greens, frosted blues, and sometimes a lemon

or two, a few gems would shift. They grew long, angular

legs and scuttled from granulated caverns,

causing us to heave with laughter,

my sides aching, and his hearty chuckle breaking

the sound of waves. We traveled the line

of surf and beach off the Maryland coast, yellow boots

in muddy suction rendering me in need of saving.

Papa's experienced hands pulled me from the muck

like the blue crabs we hunted (though I looked for  
a brilliant red in naivety). And when we reached  
the dock winding perpendicular to our house,  
we'd spill the fragile harvest onto the weathered  
wood, rolling them between our fingers under gray  
water, and leaving them to glisten in lamplight  
like tiny lighthouse beacons.

## Mother-Daughter Medium

The sky quivers with His touch—images  
echo and capillaries wrinkle clouds. Wavering  
cityscapes fall to fuzzy tree lines, the world overexposed—  
an evolution of passersby to ghosts.  
Even before phone calls, I know.  
You know. Stillness turns us vintage  
yellow, cripples us among the swift gatherings

of urbanites as neon ambulances warp  
like cartoons, and the squealing green of flat-lining  
becomes reality. Without seeing me for weeks,  
only conjuring my face in windows, you know every plea  
I make to God—*I wonder if she needs me  
as much as I need her*. Our minds, as if torqued  
by gravity, try to fill in the blanks—the blind

love rooted in a mother-daughter . . . and on some damp  
nights, we feel full. After rain speckles windshields, clouds  
become invisible, and together we drive into that blur  
of sky and highway, there's something that stirs  
between us, something bigger, pulling us while stars burst  
into great interrogation lamps  
shaped like our gaping mouths.

Funny Jar in the Corning Museum of Glass

*Lord, how many things there are in this world of which Diogenes hath  
no need!*

—Diogenes of Sinope

Egg blue and red velvet whimsies  
stuffed into translucence—the stilled life of a child,  
hundreds of frivolous “finnimbruns.” Limbs of a flimsy  
burlap and cotton doll wave wild  
goodbyes—*Your crooked, red lips can't smile.*  
Behind, a proud paper Siamese cat  
hunches its back, ready to pounce on a cigar  
box. Or is that an ivory glove next to the Chinese finger trap?  
Junk dances, *trembles*, in the light of camera stars  
popping off the anti-flash case. Fingerprinted postcards,  
torn Spanish fans, bottle caps left after quenching  
a traveler's thirst, were once scattered on tables,  
once cluttered toy chests. Compressed under a French  
teapot lined gold and a teal Merry Christmas label,  
another hand—cold plastic—reaches, unable  
to grasp its counterpart of woven skin. Teeth  
that used to chatter and jive, a red balloon,  
and a 1943 steel cent regress beneath  
the oddities. A plastic flower, deprived of bloom  
mimics the life of springtime and June's  
gaudiness . . . What could you have bought  
with that penny?