

INTERLUDE

Evening has taken me by surprise:
All day bound in this tension
Of collar and tie, held
By the knot my own hands secured
At my throat. This one trick
Even Houdini refused, to be locked
In a body without imagination.

Thank God for the darkness,
The flavor of flannel nightshirts
Dropped over the head like a curtain
Where all the creases unfold
And all the old dreams tumble out.



Lorraine Ferra

GOING HOME

-for M.B., 1899-1979

"Low tolerance for pain," they said,
As they explained your death
And stripped the room, taking
The clock, the television,
The knitted brown and grey spaniels
That stood on your headboard like sentries.

You gave me stories from your girlhood
As you drifted back
To the tall grass on the Kansas homestead
Where you watched the rabbit sleep in the moon,
To the brown-haired boy who first
Touched you in the cornfield.

Some days you were tired
And silent, the long winter
Settled in your hip,
Your face pale as the sun
Those dark afternoons.

Then you remembered
The sudden blizzard—
Your father and you snowblind
In the buckboard, in the middle
Of the vast bare tableland.
How he gripped your arm and dropped the reins,
Turned it over
To the two dark geldings
That led you home.

MONUMENT

Driving past Price Canyon I enter
Coal country, smokestacks
Puffing like trains,
Dark shale peeling the hills,
Leftover snow black
On the roadside.

On Main Street
In Helper, Utah,
Dwarfing the Catholic church
Where the painted arms of Jesus & Mary
Welcome the dusk
Big John, the coal miner
Swings a pickax over his shoulder.
He smiles and steps west
Toward Spring Canyon
Where twenty years ago
A town disappeared
In a shaft.