

My Androgynous Years

I had a crisis at the supermarket, yesterday.
I said to myself softly, so no one could hear,
I said, Your soul is *not* stepping
from your body. I said, Stop it, relax.
And I did. I held it all together
past the magazines and gum,
through 8-Items-or-Less and out the door.
I sat in my car and let mascara
run down my arms like greasy rain.
Until a woman in a Volvo beeped
and pointed at the asphalt under me,
unwilling, I guess, to wait any longer.
When I was eight my sister hated me.
She hated clothes and make-up.
She hated buckled shoes.
We'd walk Vermillion Street beneath
the insect sizzle of neon
to buy my mother cigarettes,
loiter like felons till
all seemed clear in Lee's Liquor-Mart.
I'd ask Peter Lee where the Cokes had gone
and he'd come around to help me look
while my sister snaked her hand to a packet
of Pall Malls and was gone. On the way home,
sometimes, she ran ahead, easy over long legs.
She'd find a crumbling vestibule
to soothe her shadow down to stone,
and time my slow arrival.
We'd sit near a puddle of ragwater
or piss, her laughter a hand against
my neck, and wait for my sobs to soften.
I share my lunch today with a boy from

Peru, Indiana. He recites King's
"I Have a Dream" speech
rising off the bench to shake his fists
at the assembled phantoms.
Pigeons scatter and regather, and all around us
haloes appear and vanish, the fountain mist
blown in rainbows and to pieces.
He is splendid and I offer all my Fritos.
One night he will come to me like a dream
on the television, and announce
a special offer: laser-sharpened knives
or a three-record set.
But that's the future. For now
we hold hands and talk about the news,
which is much better than yesterday's
but only half as good as tomorrow's.