

From the Second Story

At our summer bungalow in Rockaway, 1947, the window
 screen
 Fell and I followed it halfway down to the sidewalk.
 What saved me was an ordinary thing – isn't that usually
 the case?
 A phonecall, a white peony in bloom, an hour alone at last.
 Caught on the window crank, the strap of my blue bath-
 robe
 Remained somehow tied to my waist, and I hung.

A nuclear bomb was in a similar position in Nevada –
 This was in a movie I once saw in which a wide-eyed, slow
 Speaking minister sat on the ground to watch. I remem-
 ber
 He said it was like the colorless eye of God. Later,
 Thin with cancer, he explained how he thought the metal
 helmet
 Would protect his eyes, the Lord his body, how the white
 light
 Was the power divine harnessed in the desert for brighter
 things –
 Those of sky, of earth, of water, and he cried . . .

Desire has a long, long arm and a garment
 That can sometimes be tied. I don't remember if I cried
 Or not, I remember Uncle Harry, newly back from the war,
 Pulling up in his Olds. He ran and stood below me looking
 up.
 For a few more moments, I hung between a scream
 And a giggle, between this life and the next
 Like the crazy woman down the street I saw one spring.

In a blue coat and feathered hat she lay herself down
On a stretcher as if she were Queen Esther. Barely
glancing
At her attendants, she folded her hands over her middle.
Then they deftly lifted her up to the ambulance
And she was driven away. As for me,

After hanging for those few minutes which became legend
In our family, I was slowly lowered into my uncle's arms
By my father to begin my life again. And like some small
package,
Whose importance by accident has grown, I was wrapped
Back inside my bathrobe, I was carried up the stairs.