

1977

Afternoon

Kathryn Stripling

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of the candles from every long evening
like eggs in my apron. A cup of tea

and I sit down to sew
nothing. I watch the gray sky
through the eye of each needle
my fingers have ever held up to the light
and I wait for the mousetrap to spring

in the pantry where peaches still cling
to their stones. I have made my house ready
for ice. Every hole's stuffed
with cloth. Every window's nailed shut.
When the sun sets I turn the key
twice in the lock, blow
the candles out. Nothing can come
to me now. I have no blessings to count.

I count my cold fingers and toes.

Afternoon / Kathryn Stripling

If these leaves between

the light and where we lie
together almost sleeping, burning
themselves out the same,

the same as always
though I stroke your thigh
that lies against my own

until its dark hair warms
my palm like pinestraw kindling, if
this should be too much

on my mind, the fading
not the fire, for me to dare
to wonder what will happen

to us, please forgive me.
But don't look at me like that,
as if your eyes can't help

but hold an hourglass of light
in each, and light already six o'clock
and sinking. Makes me tired

enough to turn away from you
sometimes, from love
itself that makes me want

the two of us alive forever.

Planting / Mark Jarman

We are playing what our friend played
On the sea cliff: not falling.
It's a game where we walk the peaked
Mortar. Embedded gravel nicks our shoe heels.
And the wall, like a walk you dream of
In a bad dream, stretches out
From the coal bin to the end of the garden.
We won't fall. It's rhubarb on one side,
A plaster vase of bulbs on the other.
The factory chimney smears a black chalk line down the sky.

The day that boy crawled above us,
Delicate as a lizard, up the pigeon-holed cliff,
Dark blue in his school blazer and shorts,
We watched till the castle keep at the top
Melted him in shadow. How could he have fallen?
As if a trick had occurred
Like a blue bush from a hat, we turned
Our cricked necks to catch the magic
And he was down. A rain of torn clay
Pattered around us on the wet sand.