

Sister Bernice

She does not remember
which rebuff, some
little gesture of tenderness,
that broke to her: to him,
“wife” meant housekeeper,
nanny, nothing more.
From then on,
pain was established
as her whereabouts,
her dwelling-place, her
looking-glass;
muttered into the dark whorled
marquetry of the oak dining-table;
grimaced into the silver teeth
of shining forks.
Sorrow burdened her baskets
of washing, bowed her shoulders,
sagged the clothesline.
Bitterness’ constant presence
in her mouth summer’s
ripest peach could not dissolve.
Winter and spring, she kept her
home, kept her peace, kept
toiling, spinning the long threads
from bridal gown
to shroud, grieving
the living, envying the dead.