

MY MOTHER'S MANIA

You were never supposed to have children
Your priest and parents and doctors didn't want you to.
You and Dad downplayed your maladies
With lyrics from rock melodies your parents hated,
Your parents who couldn't take us later
Because of the abuse they caused you and each other.

The church pews never confessed that abuse
You clung to a faith that prevented you
From preventing us, and prevented you
From terminating us
So instead, we grew inside your body,
Unfamiliarly unmedicated for three pregnancies

In your unhappy twilight years
I watched you, a sexagenarian woman
Cry for her mommy, who'd have been ninety-two
The same way we: newborns, children, young adults
Must have cried for you, a mother
Too disordered to be a mommy.

And still you – mother of three, grandmother of five
Cling to a faith that prevents you
From being happy in your twilight years
As it prevented you from preventing us
As it prevented you from terminating us
As it prevented you from terminating you

MY MOTHER'S HANDS

I once joked about lending you
My `seductive red' nail polish
Somewhere in the off-again
Part of the on-again, off-again
Relationship you had with Gary.

I suppose it would've looked strange
On your hands, rubbed raw from
Hard work, much harder than it had to be.
It wouldn't have complemented
The superglue you used to bind
The deep cracks in the skin
On your knuckles to keep the blood
From seeping up through
The life lines on your palms.
It would've made the fertilizer
And cardboard box shavings
Harder to clean out from under your
Neglected, fractured fingernails.
I imagine it would've looked better
On the hands that held me
When I was a baby.

Have they always wrung in
Nervousness, even when you
Swaddled me in infancy,
Broadcasting your anxiety to the world?
I might've inherited that from you.

SISTER CHRISTIAN

We were all close to God -
My brother and sister and me
Crammed into creaky pews of
Oak under layers of white paint
Between the blended family
We stomached and our friends
The pastor's kids.

We chased each other
Up the street each day
The church doors opened,
Hungry for God's love
Before we became cynical intellectuals
Laughing at the absurdity
Of immaculate conception.

You were the last of us
To cling to your faith,
To swear by its influence
In guiding you through life,
To share your testimony
In parts of the third world
Us two would never go.

As long as you believed,
I nourished the hope that
There was hope for something
Beyond this world, simply
Because you believed.
Today you told me you find
Christianity hard to swallow,
And I lost all remnants of belief.