Forte’
A Journal of Poetry, Prose, and Art
by the students of
Illinois College
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**Preface**

As editors, we wanted to put together a journal representative of the creative works of Illinois College students. We hope readers find this edition to be a thoughtful and justifiable selection of these works, and that they enjoy sharing in the continued celebration of language and art at Illinois College.

We thank all those who submitted. Your work, along with the editorial process itself, taught us a great deal.

Peri and Jill
Lisa Liss

Bats

Bats,
resting in my head,
quiet and unnoticeable,
looming in corners and crevices,
potential energy,
still until spurred,
sleeping until aroused by some
pain or passion,
indecision or inner conflict
and then they fly wildly about,
flitting,
dark,
beautiful
and unanticipated
in a silent world
of now muted mass confusion
until I reach up
grab them
one
by
one
and pen them down.
Down From the Mountain
-from Edith Wharton’s Summer

"O.K." I said, and for an instant
his breath was mine,
lips arms hair -- ours
under the beaten and weather bruised roof
nailed on to the sides, boards
nailed to corners, holes
stuck into the ground, slanted
tilted,
falling slowly
like the back of my head,
small of my back,
torso,
heels,

had dropped to the dirt floor,
months after you had gone
when I fainted
from the weight of your child.
Rachel Thebus

Writer’s Block

The sleek, smooth staff created for my hands
grooved for the best grip during intense concentration.
Why can I not grasp the words
    flowing from my brain
down the length of my arm
taunting my fingertips?

Gnawing on the bland plastic covering
preventing tasteful distraction.
Let me taste the spice
    that seasons my words
and flavors my characters!

The familiar scent of the writer’s frequent usage—
the sweat from my labor.
This is not the stench of evil,
the perfume of spring,
or the essence of love.

Damn this implement,
Censor of my thoughts and ideas!
I censor it myself, the cheap little Bic
    and ban it to the scraps and trash
of my wastecan of exiled dreams.

The sleek, smooth staff created for my hand
grooved for best grip during intense concentration.
Sounds of potential words
    pour from the tip
to the paper that absorbs them.
Erika Rasch

silence

Finally,
at 2 in the morning
the door slams shut one last time.
The uproar subsides to silent shrieks
while the kettle whistle reads
intermission to the anguish
she allows.
I crouched upon that stairwell,
blending the neutral wall;
only a shadow in the heartache she takes
while
I listened,
the wooden steps of generation
traced my thoughts to
the mark left on me
not to follow in her footsteps.
Not to dwell on the pain she's hushed
when he beats down that door,
not to see this forming
again and again- when I know
finally,
at 2 in the morning
I'll sleep
to what
she pleads
alone.

Owl

William McRoy
Buddy McDaniel

A Wish From a Seven-Year-Old Black Girl
(for Linda)

I don't wanna be Black no more,
It just don't seem right,
Cuz I'm gonna be a princess,
When the doctor makes me white.
And my nappy hair will be straight,
And my brown eyes will be blue,
And I will have little bitty feet,
To fit a narrow shoe.
And I will buy some elephants,
And let them run through the door.
Stompin' flat most anything,
That can make me black once more.
Then I'll take a moment
To bid my old life goodbye,
Then I'll board a plane with Barbie,
And far away we'll fly.
At that time I'll be pretty,
With my new looks that I stole,
Cuz now mama says I'm ugly,
With my skin as black as coal.

McDaniel 9

What I Need
(for Mikyra)

Take my watermelon
and my new black cadillac
take the tap shoes, the boombox,
the jerricurl, the coat of fox,
take all of it back.
Take the grits and gravy
and all that gangsta rap
take the collard greens, the hog jowls,
the gang movies, the pig's bowels.
I don't want none of that crap.
Take the old, old disco songs
to which I have to dance
take the ripple and the car wrecks
the gubment cheese and the projects,
and just give me a chance,
The Sambo Dolls

The man-child rhythm beats out
a desperate hollowness
across the killing floor
of the Promised Land.

I'm a-goin' to Chicago,
they gotta different way 'bout things.
Sweet Home, Sweet Home
Where I can swing in my own manner.

Times was we wanted freedom,
Forgetting that nervous twitch,
tied to a suspended design-
their cool eyes focused behind you.

Times was we wanted more
than fancy tappin' of smilin' fools.
The practiced hands rehearsing
tomorrow's show in the corner.

Gaming with a mimicked tempo,
Subtle arms, pleasingly bent.
Legs in twisted balancing act
follow the pattern with deferring steps.

I'm a-goin' to Chicago,
they gotta different way 'bout things.
Sweet Home, Sweet Home
Where I can swing in my own manner.

Forlorn dancing of figurines
lightened by polished gestures.
The animated routine prevents
taught strings from clanking like iron.
The Blind Side

Life and nature combine to give us old and new; we notice just what side the grass is greener on.

Emotions mean nothing to the sides we hide in front of stone, a side hidden so deep only angels could see.

The other side is blind, sees nothing. A rainbow has many colors. What color are you? What side are you?

The side that opens doors locks you in—the moment they close.

The side exists but functions only in our minds. Or is it the side that is what we really are?

Does anybody ever really see this side? Does anybody want to see this side—the other side?

The Jesus Root

I'm gonna be a tree when I grow up, A tree with broken, splinter rattled branches and twelve thousand rings. I'm gonna be lightning struck and burned and split. I'm gonna have one live branch and I'm just going to eat time. I just want to sit there and eat time. I'm gonna produce one berry every 400 years and I'm gonna have one big old Jesus root going straight down into solid, fucking rock.
Song of the Wicker Pigeon

The barn holds
a wicker pigeon
and wicker pigeon feathers
cought by the pea pod barn owl
who sleeps somewhere above.
And the little wicker pigeon
coo's his little contentment song
up in the rafters
slicking down stick up feathers
bobbing his little bird head
to his own little barn groove.

Sometimes the wicker pigeon watches cornflower girl
roll and tumble in the hayfield out back...

And the coveted feathers
from the wicker pigeon
line the nest
of that little round poodge deer mouse
who rolls
and scampers in the barn dust
echoing beneath
the oaken barn floor.

cornflower girl

cornflower girl stood upon the riverbank
with double fistfuls of mud
which would become the castle
for her broomstick dolls and fingerprints.

cornflower girl gently lifted the leaves
to count the baby rabbits, sleeping, breathing,
dreaming of milk, in the hole in the grass
beneath the fencepost.

cornflower girl rolled and giggled and slid in the dust
and grass until her white flower-print dress
was sweat-slicked, brown and warm.

cornflower girl would flop down naked on the riverbank
and the sun would steal peeks at her
through the shadows of the leaves
which swam back and forth across her body
on a cool, mud spring morning.
Silver Black

Her somber eyes were silver black.  
She couldn't take her stark words back.  
He held her hand and held her heart.  
The time had come for them to part.  
The gun beneath the pale moon shone.  
Her smile gleamed forth like polished bone.  
She gripped the metal in her hand.  
He struggled then to understand.  
The ice-kissed calm that soon befell  
Escorted star-crossed hearts to hell.  
The gun lay in a blackened pool.  
Thus ended then the lovers' duel.
an excerpt from
Shadowbag Factor

I didn't get much sleep that night. Between the nervous tension brought on by the night's events, and the inconsistency of the oatmeal I made, I got about three hours tops. I must have been there for two hours, eyes frozen open, wondering if I had left any trace back in that alley of who I was. Good citizen or not, I wanted to put that night as far away from me as possible. I get my fair share of weirdness from my collection of Fellini films. I don't need it intruding on my real life, thank you very much.

The first thing that I noticed when I woke up the next morning was the absence of the bag. The couch was sitting there, empty, an innocent bystander in the events of the past evening. I assumed that I had thrown it away during one of my many trips to and from bed at all hours of the night. The whole night was a bit hazy in my memory, like a bad dream that had gotten a little too out of control. That whole thought process was confirmed when I looked in the mirror. My face had the look of sleep that had been torn asunder by nightmares. Black rings circled beneath my eyes, the skin on my face was a sickly, pallid mask stretched over my skull. I concluded that yes, it was just a dream. So I smelled more than a little like a rubbish heap. So my fingernails were black with dirt. Kind of like the kind found in gravelly alleyways. So what. Could have happened any time last night.

I stumbled to the kitchen to perk some coffee. I needed it, to clear the hangover that the lack of sleep had hit me with. I fumbled with the lid on the beans and nearly shattered the carafe when I tried to rinse it out in the sink. Finally, I got it all together, and set up the pot to brew. It dripped and hissed as I clumsily yanked the Pop-Tarts from their flimsy cardboard domicile. I almost snapped them in half tearing them out of the foil. They slid neatly into the toaster, and I walked to the door to get my morning paper.

The air in the hallway was brisk. This, complimented by the fact that I was wearing nothing but a pair of red boxers, made me shiver audibly. The paper rattled slightly in my hands as I picked it up. Apparently Haiti was going to be invaded any day now, according to our Commander-in-Chief. The paper crackled sharply as I folded it, and the bag flew apart as I dropped it to the floor. My right shoulder slammed into the door as I jerked backwards, yelping in surprise.

I thought I had seen that bag, peeking around the corner at the end of the hall. I swear, I thought I saw it watching me, out of the corner of my eye. When my eyes bolted to look directly at it, though, it was nowhere to be seen. No sign of movement, no bag, not even a shadow that I might have mistaken for it. I shook my head, stubbornly trying to correct my eyesight, so that I might see what it was that had been there less than a second ago. It was no good. I gathered up the pieces of the newspaper, and headed back into the kitchen.

Work that day was a chore. I got into the store and found, to my dismay, that there was nothing to do. My supervisor was on vacation, and, at a small volume music store, Monday mornings can be quite a drag. I hitched across the street as soon as I had set up everything for opening up. The coffee at the gas station left something to be desired, mostly a desire to heal your scalded taste buds. The street was damp and scuttled with wet leaves that stuck to the heels of my shoes as I shuffled back into the store. I turned on the neon open sign, as well as the large "Sordyl's House of Music" sign that loomed overhead on the street corner. The store was full of busy work that could be done by anybody, and, as I had nothing better to do at the time, I set about doing it.

Now, there are a lot of dark corners in the basement of
most old, dusty music stores. Sordyl's was no exception. I wanted to believe that it was dust stirring in those shadows. I want still to believe that I didn't keep seeing twitches, silent and insignificant, just out of the corner of my eye in those dark shadows. But all that day, I couldn't help spinning around suddenly, trying to catch a glimpse of whatever the hell it was that was peering over my shoulder.

About the fifth time, I thought I saw it again. In a corner, lying against a wall. The bag. It could have been anything. A misplaced bit of light, a guitar case, anything but that damn bag. I tried to tell myself that it was impossible, that no bag in history ever followed anyone to work before, with the exception of that time I slammed the car door shut on the handle of my gym bag. But it kept eating at me. I was sure that it had been the Bag. Both that morning, and now here, at work.

I tried all day to get it out of my head. I worked obsessively on repairs, I rearranged music, I swept until one of my co-workers made a comment about eating off the floor. But, nothing at all was taking that bag off my mind.

It didn't help that I kept seeing it again and again. It wasn't as bad as if I kept turning around, and shazam! there it was. But perhaps that was what was so distracting about it. The inconsistency. The fact that one minute you would see it there, out of the corner of your eye, and the next minute it was just a dust bunny that was snagging your attention. It was enough to drive you mad.

I almost got into three accidents driving home. Either I would see that bag in the seat next to me, and nearly veer the car into incoming traffic, or I would ignore the semi turning into my lane because I was trying to ignore anything I saw in my peripheral vision. I did make it home, though, in one piece.

Two, if you count the sack.

When I got back, it was there, waiting for me, at my apartment. I couldn't see it, even at my vision's edge, but I could smell it there. It reeked like leftover fish, sitting out on Saturday after Friday was all but a memory. An anxious, nervous feeling had run through my system, and was eating at my belly with voracious abandon. I almost wished I hadn't thrown that damn bag aside that night. I wished that I had put something in it, or used it, or burned it. Anything, just to tell me that it existed at all. But now it just waited and preyed on me, lurking in the corners of my life, as in the corners of my mind.

I didn't see it the rest of the night. I guess that stands to reason. If I was watching for it, it would have no reason to peek around the corner. It couldn't sneak a peek, because I was too ready for it. More than a few times that evening, I flew into a frenzy, tearing apart selected portions of my flat to find a piece, any trace of what I was now referring to as "the Bag." Around one o'clock, I fell over exhausted onto the cushions of the couch I had strewn across the living room during some earlier rampage.

I had, as I searched, questioned the very existence of the Bag. I pondered, as any good ex-philosophy major should, on whether or not the fool piece of sackcloth was really even in this world. At one point I conjectured that perhaps, just perhaps, the 'Bag only existed because I believed in it. This argument is actually the most stable that I have come up with, then or since. If the Bag existed because I believed in it, then I, somehow, had not only animated it but was also continually imbuing it with life. I thought that I could top it, that I could flush it from my mind like a bad dream. But every time I tried to "forget" it, any thought that I used to replace it was stalked and interrupted by some essence of the Bag. Just as I was falling to sleep, I thought I saw the bag off to my left, sitting plainly on top of the sofa. It was almost looking at me, I deemed as I fell asleep on the harsh mixture of tile floor and rough, scratchy cushions...

I called in sick the next day. It was bad enough having that fucking bag tail me in my apartment. One more day of work with it might just make me snap permanently. I woke
up with my back twisted into roughly the shape of a pretzel. I was in the process of rubbing the night out of my eyes when I noticed that there was a blanket covering me. I had not covered myself with a blanket when I fell asleep. Furthermore, I don’t keep a blanket anywhere near the living room, where I passed out. I don’t even remember owning this particular blanket. This shook me up a bit. I hurriedly tossed the blanket over the mess that was once the couch, and crept nervously the the kitchen, as if at any moment, the blanket might leap from its position and try to smother me.

I stopped when I reached the door to the kitchen. The toaster was on. The coffee machine was happily perking away, and there was an egg frying on the stove. It was just to the point in cooking that I would have had to arrive at the moment I did for it to be perfectly cooked. The toast popped up. Toast had a special smell, especially the way I prepared it. I could smell, from across the kitchen, that this toast was made exactly that way, Not too burned, but not too under done.

I fell to the floor with a resounding thud.

I woke up a few minutes later. I looked around frantically, hoping that it had all been part of some wild hallucination, a crazy dream that I had forgotten to wake up from. I looked at the stove, and, sure enough, there was no trace to be seen of any eggs, or pans, for that matter. The toaster was empty. The coffee pot was clean, completely bereft of coffee. I sighed with relief as I rose from the floor. No sooner had my field of vision crossed the threshold of the kitchen table than did all the air suddenly leave my lungs in an exclamation that sounded something like a train’s last words. Sitting neatly arranged at my place was a perfectly prepared breakfast. A thermal mug presided over it all, steaming from whatever sat inside. The eggs were over easy, and sat next to toast and sausage on one of the plates of my only good set of dishes. Orange juice was immaculately poured into a tall juice glass. No spilling, no grease, no place mat.

There was a note beside it all, on a Post-it pad. Written in eloquent, pristine handwriting was a little message:

Hope you like it
don’t worry
I’ll get the dishes

Yours truly,

I didn’t know what else to do. So I sat down and ate some breakfast.

___________________
Kimberly Bess
Motel Jesus
A Study in Haiku

The Motel Jesus
Hanging lightly on a nail
Has dark troubled eyes

A dark stare that sighs
Piercing the dimly lit air
Gazing at the wall

Dingy rotten walls
With ripped flowered wallpaper
Have one lone window

The sole grimy pane
Etched by spider-webs of cracks
Let in a warm breeze

The pleasant zephyr
Drifts across threadbare blankets
Toying with the sheets

Two Lovers toying
Deliciously enjoying
Their carnal delights

Human pleasures end
The two lay entwined sleeping
In heartless embrace

Two hearts of granite
Each the gem of the other
Hung on their own neck

A noose sways gently
Above a crowded crossroad
Where there is no God

God roams the highway
So who weeps for man? It's not
The Motel Jesus
Kernel Ted

The trauma. Headaches, trembling, constantly sweating from the anticipation. It's all the evils that come from my job. People laugh at me, but they don't know. It's gut-wrenching.

I don't know how it all started. One day I'm home playing Sega, the next evening I had a job most people would turn down, and have. It takes a strong person to sell popcorn during Bingo Night. Not everyone's cut out for it. I'm not sure I am.

People only see the luxuries. Yeah, I have seven days and six evenings a week off, but for those three hours every Tuesday night, well, let's just say nobody has offered to take my place. It's the fighting.

"Come on, Boy! Medium bag with no salt because my doctor says it will raise my blood pressure,"

"Ted, let's move it! If I miss a call, I'll report you!"

"Whatever happened to that nice lady who was here before you?"

"I know your grandmother, and I don't think she'd appreciate hearing that I caught you eating on the job!"

Oh yeah. My grandmother. Grandma got me this job. When she found out that my car broke down, she knew it was only a matter of time before Happy Bill's Pizza delivery fired me. She waited and she made her move. She was like a snake. When her teeth sunk into me she knew she had me. She had me, alright. Every Tuesday night in St. Peter's gymnasium.

I didn't think it would be so bad but the first Tuesday opened my eyes. I should have known this wasn't right when the first time I walked through the parking lot one of the old ladies threatened to have a priest's car towed if he didn't move it out of her lucky spot. From what I know now, that priest should have known better.

That was Ethel. She's lethal. Lady would wear her wig inside out if she thought it would bring her luck. But she's no different from the rest. Some pretend to be sweet little old ladies, but they're not. They're there for one reason and that's to take home more than everyone else.

It's not the cash or prizes, it's the competition. They don't jump up and celebrate when they win. They don't pat each other on the back. They taunt and point their crooked little fingers at one another. The ones without arthritis sometimes get up and dance to tease the others. They're predators and I'm just an obstacle in their way.

I'm getting better. I'm starting to figure out what everyone wants. Betty's no butter, medium bag. Ethel's small bag with just a touch of salt. Mary's tub with everything you can find in it. The worst is when Irene comes up. She always takes what seems like an eternity every time. She's in good health so she beats the others with the canes and walkers to the front of the line between games. But it's only a matter of time before she's struck by one of those canes.

I'm telling you, these people are mean. I stand there shaking while I wait during games for some crazed senior citizen to yell that five letter word to end the war and start the sound of metal chairs scraping the floor and begin my frenzy towards the popcorn stand. If it weren't for my pride, I wouldn't have made it this far.

It's been a month now. I'm going to be strong and stand tall. You have to if you're going to survive here. I'm going to make it. I'm not going to be just another statistic.
Chad Heltzel

My Soul Sings to Gravity

Every ounce of my mind
Is a rock waiting to plummet
Into charted waters
And to splash up
Only the slightest tears upon
Dry, sandy shores.
My spirit is a yoke
Pulled and strained
By herds of powerful beasts
That grunt and moan
With every thought
Of the burden I carry.
Though my body may float
Like dust and feathers
Through the air and clouds
And to the heavens,
My soul remains grounded
My soul watches the body in flight
My soul sings to gravity.
Fire

It was cold. So, in between the "where is this going?"s and the "I don't know what I want"s she scuffled into the house for the comfort of her wool mittens and a blanket as she scavenged for wood and bark and brush.

Their white breath tangled in the air. Pacing, he pulled a tattered book of matches from his frayed back pocket and lit the last one, recklessly tossing it into the mass they had collected. The wood was still wet with last night's snow. They watched it mince and smoke and crackle and blend. They watched the flames spurt, then branch towards the sky, bending in the wind.

She thought of how she used to love his fires. When snow flurried and wind whipped through the cracks in the window panes, he would build them in her fireplace. They would coddle and spoon as she watched orange streams flow in his eyes and discovered new freckles on his face.

But now, out in the harsh air, his face blurred flushing red. Hands out, palms facing fire and blocking heat, she watched him tilt his head back, exposing his naked neck, and bathe in the warmth of it.

Zinnias

My zinnias are dying, but I'm not sad. In days when sunlight began lingering longer, and outside of my window was all water and birth, I planted them. I dug each trench and scattered each seed and left soil sticking to my knees. How lovely, I thought, they would look surrounding the water basin, dried and cracked with weathered mint freckles, like the picture in those magazines whose pages my mother dog-ears after tossing them into the grocery cart with double-A batteries, toothpicks, and pumpkin seeds for my father to gnaw and spit. "They'll never grow there," he'd say removing soil smudged gloves to wipe his forehead. I didn't listen. When it was hot and earth cracked at their stems, I put on my smoky blue wide-brimmed hat and his gloves, which crumpled at the fingertips, and I watered them. They grew there, not all, but some. They bloomed in clumps of cupped hands of magenta, smiled gold and yellow spidering sunshine, and breathed life and old earth, each strange and unique images of nature. My mother cut some and put them in a glass vase at the center of the dining room table, and when my father's friends would walk down our cobblestone steps, and into my parents' home,
He'd point and say, "My daughter planted those."
I watched them,
examined them from afar,
but never touched them.
My zinnias are dying,
but I'm not sad.

Jill Friday

Catching the Dog

It's two a.m. and I'm
running the dog, having
driven an hour to do it,
to put him, the car, and a
long shift, good money
to bed. But he's galloping so
fast the leash flies out of my
sweaty hand, retracting cord
zipping up the walk after him,
flailing behind 'til he stops
to mark a tree, a pole.

His molting
coat looks like a woolly
mammoth's, miniature. A
back leg flops up when
I grab his collar, squeeze,
and yank his neck back
up the block.

It's then
that I see the windows. We're
one house away from home,
and he's bounded ahead
to the viny knoll next door,
landmine-filled property off of the
neighbor's french-doored front porch,
my dog's secret spot.
While I wait, my eyes
search for others'. Through
drawn shades of the
two-story brick they are
watching. I look to the
stars through my breath,
the air. I'm innocent and
he's still going, when a light
flips on like they've heard us,
somewhere, his jangling i.d. or
my thrown steps, chasing,
like they'll be through oak
and screen doors in robes
and dismay, hollering out
windows about privacy, scoopers,
and two a.m. before I
can turn around to see it is
not them, but the flash
a T.V.: my place, upstairs, the
other tenant up there, her
face glowing in the dark,
scenes fading gray to
black to sudden brightness
in the blankness of her
space— above, alone,
glasses reflecting squares
of the screen.

Dexterity

Through filtered neon lights
and smoke I make out his
rounded wrists. Reflected
white knuckles clap
against a beer bottle:
fingerless grip,
frightening swig.
He has no hands,
this man, seated
bardside, rested
nubs before him,
bottle between
his naked stumps.
He does not see me
turn away, or flick
ash, pull my hands
from my habits to
smooth the backs,
callouses, nails, rubbing
my bony fingers beneath
the table, hiding
the hands that had
all night fingered
my hair, whole hands
trapped in sticky
webs of tangles, spiderleg
fingers, grooming.
Hands— stroking
a sweaty bottle
of beer and wondering
how he might ever
type. Scissor. Or
pack his cigarettes, wipe
sleep from his eyes, steal
a swipe of chocolate
cake icing, pluck
grapes or snap beans,
slide on a wedding
ring, tickle the kids,
scratch her back
before bed. How, without
the wide, stretching of
fingers warm, soft palms
spread, touching,
candlewax extensions
melting her body wethot.
How, can he,
like my lover,
cling, grasp
at ribs, my breasts,
the tiny flames crawling
across my face, into
my lips, taste of
papercut, black olive
salt traces. Had he
ever a blister,
lifeline, the oven
of her mouth
around his fingers, and
not the swallowing
ache of appendages,
war wounds, stale
memories.

Cindy Rice

Tulips

And they curled like butterflies bunny ears,
parting in sleep in song
of yesterday when I first
picked them from the front yard.
The snap heard for miles.
There lie the petals propelled
pieces on the table on the
paper and the floor.
Water spilled erasing
the lines: tulip tears
the snap caused my cats caused
when they searched for midnight
amusement or a drink. Then they
chewed them the cats did.
They chewed the petals and the stem,
I know this because my cats
don't look guilty either.
The Lady and Me

She keeps her dolls clean. Their hair in pigtails and braids with ribbons that match their dresses. They lack the ball point pen tattoos of stars and suns and freckles on their faces like mine who are naked and like the dirt. But we play together sometimes. She’s the mother and I’m the dad or the dog. She doesn’t wonder how far down ants dig or how it feels to have feathers, but I drink her green leaf tea. It just works out that way. Her beautiful in the chase for breasts and periods and boys. And me barefoot watching with a pen.

Picture

What if I tripped and fell into your eye like a swan with no ripples and felt the thought and heard your thought of something else as the man took your picture? I would swim in your wrinkles, breathe your breath, crawl into your ear and sit listening for breezes for muses for birds. Then I’d grow big. Like Alice. Big enough to suck your form in my heated mouth like children do rocks like candy until you are clear bottle distortions of a street a story a song of monkeys I will hum while I grow.
In Celebration: A Woman’s Song

I felt it before it came.  
In the air.  In the bird song.  
Then I buckled to my knees and  
squelched the scream as it ran  
into the dirt beneath my feet.  
I watched it pool.  I watched it  
mix and clot.  I caught it  
in my hand and painted the street,  
I painted the women with purses  
the dogs the bricks the buildings  
the sidewalks all red.  
The men’s hats were red their smiles red  
the windows red my hands red  
the sun and the gutters all ran red.  
And the birds sang it in the air.  Red.