

*when no gal would give in—  
swinging me above his head  
until I scrape the ceiling—  
to no man—helpless  
in his huge hands—  
what's nine hundred years?*

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## Big Bang

We slept naked on a wide bed  
under the sighing swamp cooler.  
We strawberried in Michigan woods  
with our fat nanny, and in spring  
we gathered sand dollars on Daytona,  
passed smiling into Kodachrome.  
On the path to the grammar school  
she bumped along behind me, burdened  
with my black, funereal trombone case,  
my books and sack lunch. I pushed her  
into thorn bushes, eyed her coldly  
as she played jacks at recess  
with colored girls. When wine  
put our mother in her all-day coma  
she made our dinner, and when  
I felt like it I smacked her.  
I walked at night in exile  
far from that fatherless house  
of sobbing women while she  
did dishes at the steaming sink.  
We lay all summer in the gray  
light of TV, sun sliding down  
the sides of yellow days.  
We read books and asked no questions.

Strangers came and went  
at the very edge of things.  
Mother left us five days at a time  
while we whispered passwords,  
kept the heavy curtains drawn.  
But huge events were happening  
everywhere inside us. When  
the front door's wooden valve  
opened and we passed at last  
into astonishing light  
it took us years to find  
the words for what had happened,  
a way to put things  
in a frame. Everyone  
died, decades blew us  
to the four corners.

Now, on a far shore  
under a throbbing Christmas tree  
her children throw silver  
tinsel in the air, hang  
our prehistoric angels.  
We lean back and watch  
as if nothing odd had happened,  
laughing about the whole thing.

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## Laundromat

From the dryer  
tumbles someone's white  
forgotten bra, which I gather  
a little furtively from the floor.  
In her absence the cups  
collapse like sails