

*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?*

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.

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