

## Victorian Wreath

My grandmother was not so much bosom as backside.  
So wide I could see around only half of her at once,  
She rose in whalebone longitudes  
Beneath the broad starched streamers of her apron.

She cooked dinners with eighteen vegetables, three  
boiled meats

And a fish, and two chickens whose heads she had  
wrung while I watched,

And corn baked with nutmeg in a pudding, different  
From the corn I fed the chickens.

It all steamed and rotated clock-wise and cooled over  
a Quaker

Lace cloth. When the plates had been cleared and the crumbs  
brushed,

She brought yellow ice cream that chipped in shuddering  
crystals

Off the mound I had to eat.

In her garden grew seven kinds of dahlias, all staked and tied,  
And her cotton quilts bloomed with Victorian Wreaths,  
appliqued

In a buttonhole stitch. She wasn't bothered by the bees  
At the grape arbor swing, saying go play somewhere else,

But she fretted about the spelling of names,  
Correcting the family Bible in her florid hand, and using  
Nelle

Instead of Nellie Grey on her papers.

When she came visiting at Easter, in black lace and  
gardenias,

She sat in the middle of the sofa and talked about the water  
pump,

And Aunt India, and the gravestones ordered for the two new ones.

But when I showed her my Mickey Mouse watch,  
She said it was four-thirty, and she had to get home.

To milk the cows.

Joyce Colony

## A Funeral Chant For Resurrection Morning

Nelle, Nellie, old Nellie Grey,  
deep in the hill, your burial hill;  
deep in the blood, my Nellie Grey blood;

You, Nelle, in my tongue, my oiled-snake tongue;  
you, coiled in my jowl, this round-cheeked jowl,  
round as an apple, your round yellow apple,  
round as you, apple Nelle, sunk in your hill,  
your orchard hill, sunk beneath a yellow apple pall.

Oh, they've taken you away, my darling Nellie Nelle,  
left you in the hill, the knell hill,  
left you on the wall, your grey parlor wall,  
left you in the blood, the curl, the jowl,  
left you in my strong, round jowl;

And I mourn you, Nelle;     I mourn your tongue,  
     your sweet-oil tongue,  
     and your sweet shrub bloom     and that wall, under  
         glass,  
     in your grey parlor room;

And your oil in my tongue has to tell this new Nelle,  
     this third generation, far-removed Nelle,  
     of the depth of the hill,     of the names on the hill,  
     of the veins on the wall,     the family-tree wall,  
     of the names in her blood,     in her age-old blood,  
     in her young,     clear,     grey-eyed blood . . .

But you tell her, Nelle.     You try to tell  
     where she got her cheek and her dark yellow curl,  
     tell her where the old,     yellow apples fell  
     on the side of the hill,     the family-tree hill,  
     and tell her of the wall     in the front parlor room,  
     and the sweet shrub bloom in her cheek, in her blood,  
     in her clear,     true     Nellie Grey blood . . .

You tell her, Nelle!     You try to tell.

Joyce Colony