

*Mary M. Harris*

## **Dirge**

Men do not cry  
and my father never did  
until my mother died.  
He stood in the front of her closet,  
swaying and sobbing, choosing  
a dress for the viewing, settling on  
the floral rayon she wore on Sundays.  
In the church heavy with incense,  
he kissed her corpse, his copious tears  
beading on her cheeks waxen as plastic fruit.  
He has not ceased crying since  
a grief counselor assured him  
men are allowed to cry,  
and he does, woefully,  
for all the losses drowning  
in unshed tears inside him:  
when at eighteen he sailed to America;  
the war, a soldier he killed with a bayonet;  
how he surrendered his seventh baby, stillborn,  
in a casket white and compact as an eggshell cocoon;  
the son who buried his feelings in drugs after  
growing up believing that men cannot cry  
because his father never did.  
Tears never changed history,  
but still my father cries,  
a wailer at the wall  
he erected.

## Mincemeat

Grandma made mincemeat out of Christmas,  
 shredded holidays with her tart tongue.  
 One bitter year, she baked pies filled  
 with minced meat, gray and glutinous,  
 that no one ate, merely poked at pieces  
 on plates, molded crusts into designs.

Her sharp eye snapped the scene  
 faster than Kodak and she whisked away  
 loaded plates like dirty laundry.  
 “You do not deserve homebaked pie!”  
 she declared, not mincing words,  
 and carted her dessert home.

I wondered if she pitched each pie  
 like a frisbee from the car window  
 on the desert highway to Sun City  
 and wished just one of us  
 had loved her enough to choke  
 down a piece of her wretched pie.

## Sestina for a Son

Lamplight like a halo  
 encircles him, a wreath  
 of gold borrowed from some Madonna and son  
 whose canvas cracks like skin stretched over bone,  
 sepia and ochre muted in golden  
 shadow. He is the center

of radiance, like the sun's center

exploding into a fiery halo  
of rays, molten, golden.  
Falling across his brow, a bronze wreath  
crowns his head. He basks to the bone  
in the warmth. My son

is unaware I watch him, this son  
whose fingers arc above the center  
of the keyboard, his backbone  
sturdy, straight. A burnished halo  
frames his face like a wreath.  
His skin is amber, reflecting the golden

cast it had at birth, jaundiced, golden  
like a gilded calf. Any mother loves her son  
as much, would anchor his thorny wreath  
to her head, suffer spikes through the center  
of hands instead, bear his cross and halo  
like a martyred saint. As marrow to bone,

he fills the core of my being. Flesh and bone,  
my passion is manifest in this golden  
image. I claim no revelation, no halo  
for this vision, no longer my son  
but his own creation, the center  
of his universe. Chords echo, a wreath

of braided notes. He weaves this wreath.  
Fragile as eggshell, dense as bone,  
he emerges from the center  
of an embryo. Its yolk quivers golden  
at release. In silhouette, my son  
refracts the spotlight into a halo.

Surrounded by a wreath of golden  
light, he presses bone to ivory. My son  
strokes the keys. He is my center, my halo.