

*Jas. Mardis*

*I don't know. One night I was tucking her in  
and the next night I was crawling in bed with her . . .  
—an incest father*

NIGHT VISITS

Tonight  
as I break the silent threshold  
of my daughter's doorway  
to plant the final goodnight blessing  
to seek the sureness of her comfort  
to fret away the final  
under-the-bed monsters  
that await her urgent potty sprint

Tonight  
I am counting the steps  
of this night visit  
and measuring the frequency  
of my rising breaths  
from my chest through my mouth  
checking the realm of this daddy ritual  
for the errant call of a fractured wanting

I want to be sure that  
no more than four breaths  
quiver the tiny hairs of her brow  
that no more than  
a lightly mussed shadow  
breaks the stillness of her covers

I want to be certain  
that my steps and the final cradle of her head  
takes no more than

seven seconds  
on each of these night visits

and that her brow is never furred by my presence  
either sleeping or awake

Because

I have watched the wives  
                    cradle  
what was left of their child  
somewhere between mother, new friend and mistress

Because

I have known that the tiny faces  
must have silently cringed into the abyss of confusion

                    when the eyes revealed  
                    that the Saviour from this pain  
is the bringer of this pain

Tonight

as I break the still silent threshold  
of my daughter's doorway  
                    back into the dimly lighted hall  
back to the sureness of  
                    not having fallen toward the hellish  
fray of that  
                    from-Heaven-falling  
of that  
                    drowning mixture of confused need  
and soured panting

I am wondering

                    which doorway is being broken  
                    which pink covers are tonight  
being daddy-ruffled

which harrier of children  
    is frozen still  
in his leaning over the head of a child  
waiting for those  
    tiny, prickly stems of eyebrow  
to finally fall back into place

and

I am wondering  
why his bed-lone wife  
    has not come hurrying through the dimly lit hallway  
to see what is  
    taking him  
so long  
    again  
    tonight

## THE REMEMBRANCE

*for Displaced Africans Everywhere*

In my blood  
    there is the rhythm

beating  
    stepping out the steady pace  
of the journey  
    long remembered in my blood

and I can only think of some gritty, sandaled foot  
    black by any measure  
    patting the sand  
beating out the constant flow of stepping  
    churning the already beaten and broken grains  
further  
    into the mist that sand becomes  
along