

This obsession with invisible things.

But the concrete with its gray crumbling smile
is like a factual male.

Drive your car into me, it suggests;
I'm no bloody vagina.

The concrete stretches for miles;
the turrets with guns in position.

AT THE MUSEUM, 1938

In the native bird exhibit, the whip-poor-will, stuffed with sawdust
and arsenic, hides among arranged dried leaves in order to instruct you.
Nearby, a Navajo rug, the design a complex ideograph, a sacred
message; a man-spirit in mirror image. However, it is without annotation,
the legend meaningless; reduced to artifact. Now I am looking at a
photograph; Kill Spotted Horses' ceremonial face in a cheap frame.
In a matching frame, Blue Wing, her dark eyes set toward the mountains.
Ropes of significant beads hang from her. Gently the round cheeks
turn away. On the winding stairs, the old oak railing was crafted
into ornate spools. Every newel post is carved. And here in a glass case,
as if in a logical progression, is the tiny skeleton of a kiwi. Outside,
the great elms along the streets in Urbana, their green arched cathedral
canopies; the continuous singing of birds among their breathing branches.

SPECULATION

A girl we didn't actually know
won a contest we never heard of
and fifty pairs of new shoes.
We each had one pair of shoes
and two skirts and two blouses.
We were in high school, my sister and I.
We washed and ironed our clothes

at night. There was a depression.
The girl with all this footwear
sat in the Marot Hotel lobby.
She was part of a display.
It was probably some desperate
advertisement by some failing
business. We heard she was scared;
sat there without making a sound.
Her picture was in the newspaper;
Indianapolis, nineteen-thirty.
My little sister and I discussed it.
We could just see her closet
with those shoes hanging
in shoe pockets. "Maybe she
shares them with her sister,"
I said to my sister, my now dead
sister. "I doubt she wears them
through." My sister and I cut
cardboard to fit inside ours
when the soles grew thin.
She said, "Maybe they're stacked
in boxes. Fifty pairs, all the right
size and all she has to do
is sit around and be seen."
We didn't exactly connect this
to Blue Beard's locked room,
but each clue, like the fatal key,
has a predecessor. My sister
died of cancer from cigarettes.
She said, with her wig on the night
stand beside her bed, that smoking
always made her feel glamorous.