

performs something dangerous  
to us, to our country  
of women and poets, something  
aberrant and cruel.

No one could be so cruel to a poet.  
You were performing, walking  
a tightwire of the mind,  
raising cleaning to its rightful  
elevation, polishing  
the windows, so many stories  
above us, when it was not your house.

### THE ANIMAL KINGDOM

The rajah, when he meant to honor  
(or ruin) his subject, presented him  
with a white elephant  
he could not sell nor give away  
nor kill, but must feed and shelter  
all its days in leisure  
for it must not labor under the lash  
nor perform in public for money.

In the beginning, there were the almond  
and poppyseed muffins

I bought for Thanksgiving, telling  
my mother she could pay me for them later.

Then I kept telling her no, it does not matter.  
And the day after, I went to my mother's  
to pick up vegetables and fruits  
from my sister, and a pale aqua scarf

and white elephant creamer. And as I was speaking of the goldfish I had thought of buying, I remembered the bowl in the basement, and before the bus was due, I went out in the rain in my sweater, opened the peculiar cellar cover, unlocked the basement door.

“It’s only me, basement,” and it knew right away I had come in friendship. In the dark I had no intention of illuminating, lit only by one high small gray window, I crept up near the top of the old jelly cupboard and stole the treasure, stole the house for my goldfish, and hurried away with it

into the light. A globe of glass a foot in height, with a bag of colored gravel inside it. I had stolen a house for my goldfish. I had done it with pretense and lies. And she aided me in disguising it in plastic sacks with carrying handles, and the bus driver aided me in my flight.

I rinsed colored gravel all afternoon, soaped the bowl and polished it, and named my carp before they were bought— Lotus Blossom and Poppy Flower.

And as forever, I knew not what I was doing; at the thought of my pets I had lusted to theft. And this evening I know only *a naked human cannot survive; and this is America.*