

*Jody Barnes*

THE NEPHELIUM

The chain-link fence clattered  
as they shoved him against it  
a shiny black crow called once  
then flew off over the roof top.  
Hands, not much bigger  
than his own, grabbed and pinched  
and twisted until  
his mouth fell open in pain.  
They shoved in handfuls of twigs,  
blossoms stripped  
from the crab-apple tree.

“That’s his mom!”—  
and they were gone  
around the corner before I could get there.  
He took my hand in his, eyes so dark  
I couldn’t tell pupil from iris.  
“Those guys are funny, mom.”  
He searched my face—a pink petal,  
translucent,  
pasted to his lower lip.