

2

The casket stands for character:  
stained, unvarnished hardwood  
holds the irrefutable fact best.  
The rings of hardwood ripple outward  
like a flat scream the body lies in.

3

Memory has senses that the dead can use.  
The hand that taught us how to touch  
now feels like the wind of a man passing.

4

The family gathers together  
like so many presents to each other.  
It is the middle of winter,  
the time of the tree cut down.

## From the Blind / Paul Nelson

I lace them together carefully, the pine boughs  
under the bank at the tide's edge, hiding  
the milking stool, the cheesebox shelf  
where my shells are stored, the root  
that loops once to hold the bottle.  
There is a downed spruce that fits  
the arches of my feet above high water,  
and in the dark I crouch there with my stomach full  
like a fat child peeking at his sister,  
waiting for gratuities to wing in, whistling,  
shush down and splash in the thin pond that makes itself  
each twelve hours of my life.  
Sometimes, cradling the big ten-gauge, I imagine  
my body loafing in the marsh like a pulp log,  
a new occurrence, the man who stepped off  
the creek bridge in April 1886, or the girl  
who followed him by eight decades, my mother's  
sister's girl, talked about, pearl of a girl,

otherwise a loaf of white bread rising  
on her own existence, a stranger in the town.  
It's a fine place to hunt ducks, and that's the worst  
of it, crouched, ready for the light to let me see  
how many are sitting with the decoys, will jump into the air  
when I rise like Jesus to blow them down.

## The Fish Barn / Dave Smith

Raw nuggets of croakers cleaned in the wind, trash-hearts  
flipped on a lace of snow. Prisms. Rubies.

Always cats, but you couldn't catch one because they,  
before Christ, were wild, oh yes, and would  
come even before the fish in barrels  
fell, some of them, still flopping

and you might have been one of the ones saying  
if a man could have a coat out of those hides, why  
then he would be a rich sucker

inviolable as a cat that never thinks of weather, maybe,  
and slick decks would turn safe as heaven.  
If you were that man you'd every fall  
would end up right.

Backed to the fire, you'd throw out the meat  
quick-freezing, sugary with snow as if battered  
to fry, glistening, a jewel watched from both sides.

But you couldn't catch the wild cats who used to come  
here, silent as nightmares, all sizes ready

to snatch the least living thing, eyes full of the fire  
from barrels, all you ever saw. Those  
coming when there was no more reason, too,  
since the fish petered out, shards