

## Beyond the Door · *Dennis Trudell*

A mother takes her daughter to start college.  
The mother will stay  
at a motel for the weekend. In the dormitory,  
wandering around the dormitory,  
dreaming along the hallway while the daughter  
flirts with her new roommate—  
lost in an alley of doors that won't  
take her *back* . . . the mother  
comes upon a janitor's closet. A mother  
closing herself in a small room  
with a basin, for no reason,  
except that neither faucet will rinse her  
out of this narrowing corridor  
to old age: both have cold water.  
She stands there sweating. When she started college,  
the world was a bright, unfolding idea  
between her and something like God—  
full of ramifications; her nipples had led her  
around the green, trimmed lawns  
as though she were music. Tomorrow night  
she will drive two hundred miles  
to another dead end, hot and cold running  
water and three channels between four walls  
and a husband not on fire,  
and the music behind her nipples  
shrunk into her cellulites and weary clitoris . . .

Ah, but now. Feet along the hallway—so she  
holds the doorknob shut; her daughter's  
new friends might think she has a mother who drinks.  
The sounds stop. A pressure on the knob,  
which the mother grips against; something hisses.  
Something mutters, and behind it  
the sense of desperation, a  
*pleading* emanates through the wood or keyhole, and the woman—  
the young girl crusted outward to be  
a mother, the frightened anima inside the forty-two-  
year-old sentence of flesh—  
relaxes her fingers. The doorknob spins

like a telephone call to heaven, and the wood slab,  
slightly narrower than a coffin lid,  
blurs open  
to reveal a man standing there with a hand  
inside his jacket. "Just . . . little  
nip," he says; he grins askew and shows her the half-pint  
of vodka. She pulls him gently  
by the other wrist and closes the door. She takes  
the vodka and empties it down the sink.  
"Hey—!" But her left hand  
has moved from his wrist to his crotch, and more gently  
than she had fondled memories of her virginity,  
as though it were a cigar  
she wants to give God for a present, the mother  
caresses him. The man starts crying.  
His breath is sour, the face steeped in more flesh than she would prefer.  
"Once I . . . was—seventeen," he tells her.  
She caresses him. "I was just a girl.  
I bought a college sweatshirt," she whispers.  
They hear feet along the hallway. Something  
pulls on the knob, and moments later the two of them  
release it and step further inside the closet.  
A man or woman enters. Someone touches  
the newcomer's genitals, and a murmuring begins,  
almost like a hymn, and new footsteps beyond the door. . . .