

JUDITH CLARK

PANIC

I

Papa, driving the family car
debates politics with Saul
Mama next to him
navigates
in the back seat
Brother pinches
me scrunched
between him and Saul

Papa's voice rises
hysterical
as he turns
red faced and furious
jabbing his finger at Saul
his bullet words
flying

scatter-shot

all the grown-ups are screaming
no eyes on the road
no hands on the wheel
the car speeding
down the highway
on its own

II

Driving
breakneck speed
around Mexico City's plazas
one broken down Volks
four Mexicanos
five gringos
playing chicken with cars
cabbies
strollers
scattering roosters and goats

nine students
nine kids
on a roller coaster ride
laughing and screaming
unaware that

as the days speed by
two of us will die
demonstrators
shot down
by soldiers on rooftops
in one of these very plazas

III

Now it's me behind the wheel
driven by blind panic
adrenaline pumping
lungs constricting
praying this chase to end
to end
to turn back the clock
to be home with my baby

to be home

but I've lost my way
lost my mind
careening down this highway
toward the brick wall
the shot gun blast
the billy club
the accuser's finger

stop me

womb/tomb

My daughter says,
"Draw me a picture of your room
Mommy."

What shall it be?

Glaring white enamel sink and toilet
squat against cement block walls
Do I live in a cellar bathroom?

Small, louvered windows
constrict the light
fracture my view
fenced-in yard
thin thread of highway on a
distant hillside

But then
there's the purple paisley bedspread
apricot pink towel and washcloth
green state shirts hung on the wall
my watercolors
blue skies
rust red deserts
endless turquoise seas
a chaos of color
rends the claustrophobic order

Shall I draw
the books and books and books and books
each a ride over the razor wire fence
a friend whispering intimate secrets
late into the night's solitary silence

Or my plants
green limbed children
I water each day
till they preen their lushness
hum their assurances
I'm still a good mother

How do I draw
my door
 clanging open
 clanging shut
by an officer's hand and command
or the bustle and clamor of
fifty-nine neighbors
 I can never escape?

What do I draw for my daughter?
a tomb

 or a womb?

early Saturday morning

early Saturday morning
 like a child
 fleeing a nightmare
I creep to your room
 your bed
 your arms

We lie
 back to front
 two spoons
me
 tucked snugly
 into the soft folds
 of your body

your heartbeat
 a gentle metronome
 slows my breath
takes the tension
 of a long sleepless night
 days holding tight to
bitterness
 rage

Your soft words
 "It wasn't fair"
 release my
tears
 rain
 on parched fields.

Uncurling our bodies
 we rise
 make coffee
settle down to knit
 leaning on plumped up pillows
 at opposite ends of the bed
amiably
 facing
 each other

I peek at you:
 concentrated,
 counting stitches
you look up
 our eyes
 meet
love
 swelling my heart
 like a dandelion
 cracks a city sidewalk
blooms
 into a smile
 gentle
 genuine
for you