

## ELISAVIETTA RITCHIE

### Waiting For A Biopsy Report

To get a crack  
at immortality:  
leave better work.

Stop hanging out the wash –  
Get back to the desk.  
Yet life eclipses literature

though pinning wet clothes  
by the inlet, cattail-framed,  
on a sun-stuck day, forms a haiku.

On the line, a spider spins  
her web between the lover's shirt  
and a black lace slip: an untold tale.

The three-year-old, pumpkin-haired,  
sprints at billowing sheets:  
this Don Quixote writes his own book.

A puzzled hummingbird probes  
crimson blossoms on the waving blouse—  
Merely blood from punctured skin.

Red ink of malignancy?  
Best tend to the garden where  
summer's last tomatoes hang

blotched by hornworms, bottom rot,  
but still good if the bad's cut out,  
save what you can.

Quickly plant before first frost  
winter spinach, lettuce, chard...  
Who will be here to harvest?

Hang the world, over-rife with growth  
and love and fear and death. While waiting  
for  
the wash to dry, the phone to ring, *write*.

*Elisavietta Ritchie's poetry collections include The Arc  
of the Storm (1998) and Elegy for the Other Woman:  
New and Selected Terribly Female Poems (1996).*

## HOLLY DAY

### This Old House

Grandma called me a bastard because my  
father  
never really wanted me in the first place.  
"You should have been flushed," she'd say  
shaking her head. I remember mom  
using her body to keep the peace  
in our house, trying to keep The Family  
Together-  
"Don't get married young," she'd say  
as soon as I could listen.

I used to practice smiling  
in the closet, in the dark  
with the door shut. I could never act too  
happy  
around Grandma, because a smile out of place  
meant either drugs or premarital afterglow  
or previously undetected but constantly  
suspected  
brain damage.

Grandma said my mother was a whore. She  
said mom  
trapped my dad by getting knocked up, even  
thought  
I wasn't born until after their third  
anniversary.  
Mom used to sing in the kitchen, all alone,  
smiling like an angel at the birds outside.  
Grandma  
hated the noise, said it aggravated her  
migraines-  
six feet of dirt  
and now I can scream  
as loud as I want.

*Holly Day lives in Minneapolis.*