

PETER COOLEY

The Dolls

Chalk-white in moonlight,
this house, our children's before dark,
is almost theirs now
their eyes say, blinking back
at my sleeplessness prowling around them.
Exhibit A: rising underfoot
a rabbit, the spine cracked
to stiffen in my step, the rug
strung out with intestines; B:
on the windowsill lifting her skirt,
legs spread wide like her smile
opening, impenetrable, opening.
Or C: a thumb extended, hidden
in philodendrons: an invitation
to join her? a member severed clean?
I wander alone here
turned out, by mummy eyes
transfixed, by bodies that plastic
catches in gestures a human
throws off, moving on, moving.
Until suddenly I am dancing
before a mirror with something held up
in both my fists, my grip
on the jugular strangling a small cry
drowned by the voice box—
dancing the dance they dance,
static, but stumbling, falling,
while the others look on,
witnesses, unmoved.

Masques, Thirtieth Birthday

Old age is the name of each face
today puts on me, their features close
where I sink in them, Peter surfacing
with high tides at the extremities.

Myself at 40: balding, fat,
a face that snaps his girls
like flies; 50: the toad complete,
fly-sodden, faces going down

swelling his girth but still wriggling
to prick the next decade, alive.
60: the faces reach my thighs,
I stagger, run St. Vitus' dance

through whirlpools: calves, knees' quiver,
garters they fall to, shins,
ankles, the reflections that I wade
into my 70's, watching while they rise

shrunk to meet me, rhythms
of the pond each morning occupies
where we swim smaller at the mirror,
this last face I have reached to face him.