

LAURIE B. WESSELY

Seder

At the table
the children
laugh and tease
as parents shush
and tell
strange stories
of plagues
and enemies
many years gone—
though the enemies
they say
still sweat from
the Earth's pores—
and the bitter herb
still haunts my
tongue,
a reminder of
youngness
laughing too,
not knowing
what it is
to be here
this night.
Someday
they will dream
of death-angels
and small men
with small
mustaches
and big ideas,
of stars,
and lampshades,
soap and candles,
and showers,
and trenches,
and hate
and hate,
and the
cruel stench
of brothers
and sisters
no longer
suffering
and those
numbers
branded like acid
screaming
Auschwitz
Auschwitz

and the Iron Cross
teasing like an
innocent pinwheel
only this has
severed praying
hearts
on each point.

They will know.
They will dream—
as I dream—every night
that they too
will have to
stand quiet
praying praying
praying
for the end
so that finally
they may join
the un-suffering
mass of death
beneath them.

Rising from
the trench,
the smell
of my brother,
my cousin,
eats at my
nostrils and brain
until I can
only cry softly
"God help me."

Had-gad-yah,
Had-gad-yah