

LORETTA RANDALL SHARP

## *For Linda*

### *1. The Viewing*

If only there were daisies here in tin cans.  
These flowers are too nice: ivory-tongued anthurium,  
gladiola mouths holding their long, red O's  
while Sister Smith whispers, "Aren't the roses  
something? They'll open at the cemetery."  
And she goes on: both legs broken, neck snapped,  
steering wheel right through your ribs.

The mortician had left them alone, she says.  
He'd handled a Mormon funeral before, in Detroit.  
And your spirit hovered near the three old women  
called to dress you. They felt it

while they stretched garment strings, pulled  
white nylons over legs pieced together in plastic  
bags. What lifting to fit you into that white  
dress, to tie the apron just right. They've patted  
you into place, tidy as the bread you daily baked.

The sister smooths the robe, fluffs the bow.  
How she must have worked, her fingers coaxing  
yours to an attitude of rest. Tomorrow's time  
enough for the just to rise; today you're ready  
for viewing.

## 2. *The Services*

The meetinghouse fills. Did you know every Jack-Mormon in Michigan? The bishop tells us you never uttered a cross word—you could scold him so he should know the mortician drained blood yesterday. Already, bigger than life is better than life.

The family's here (all but the minister-father who preached all things pure to the pure in heart and abused his daughters). Your brother, the first Mormon among them, bows his head. His wife never accepted your lack of restraint, but she cries.

Even your coming into the church was unrestrained. So evidently pregnant the elders thought you properly married. And you said yes, the divorce final, the new marriage made, when your brother flew in to baptize you. A year later the stake president called for a long interview. Baptized as though bearing the name of the man in your home and now wanting to go to the temple.

You called your brother then to explain it all. How could his wife know that sins, though scarlet, would be white as snow? Whiter even than the putty of your face. The freckles never showed so before.

And then all those babies. Eleven times, yeasty as the loaves of bread you kneaded. Seven sons from such risings, the newest seven months old.

This is not moderate, your going so.

## 3. *The Dedication*

We do not have enough processional flags. More people drive to the township cemetery than are buried there. The maples are still yellow, but everyone says snow is in the air.

A Mormon can dedicate a grave in less than three minutes and leave you to loose soil. I'll come back tonight and gather the fat roseblanket, all these wreaths. But I will not bring daisies. The maples will be enough. And the wind that testifies a presence by the space it leaves when passing through.