

# Hemmed In

*Michael J. Noble*

Above, the divorcee  
with the baggy eyes and bleached hair  
draws an evening bath.  
The dull pat of bare feet  
and the rush of piped water  
ring through the elderly walls;  
the light suspended from my ceiling  
swings right, then left  
like a pendulum.

The magpie laughter  
of three generic teenagers  
reverberates down the hall,  
amplified by the echo.  
That would be apartment 8,  
whose door is perpetually open  
and whose inhabitants keep no secrets.  
Those who pass going up or down  
just serve as extras on the set.

The television of the deaf landlady  
begins to play an aggressive version  
of the "Star-Spangled Banner."  
I lie in my bed waiting for the static to start.  
As usual, my consciousness slips,  
and I jump at the sudden  
shift from music to chaos.

In number 10, there is silence  
though it is that pregnant quiet  
which expects to birth the rattle  
of keys at 2:00 a.m. when the bars close.  
Red-eyed and blurry, he'll try  
every key twice before one works.  
But the interruption will be brief.  
He'll pass out before he has a chance  
to shed the day's smell and dirt.

Below, Thursday's garbage  
goes crashing onto the street  
as two curs quarrel territory.  
The bastard on the first floor  
peppers his trash with rat poison.  
I imagine a hungry bag lady,  
then, roll over dreaming  
of the vacant apartment below.