

# Clay

*Philip White*

On the sill, torsos wrenched out of clay  
still bore the sculptor's mark, the print

of cocked thumb and nail. Tortured, vaguely  
female, they shamed us. We crowded in,

snickering, hands over mouths, and Sister Larson  
said, Hush. In the dark corner the man

looked up from wrists deep in slurry.  
He moved over, slammed a grey plug on a wheel,

and hunkered down. What he made stilled us.  
Something in long fingers grazing the perfect

lip, drawing shapes out of the clay, shapes  
we'd have sworn we'd seen—but where?

Storybooks? Dreams? What else did we know?  
He punched them down, got up. Quiet,

we filed out past the breathing kiln, shelves  
lined with green ware drying, shrinking in

whitening, waiting to be hardened in fire.