

The Skin of the Story

Susan Elizabeth Howe

Three of her children were taken:

one whispered
out of life by a flapping heart,

one stoned in the head by a tumor,

one catapulted through a windshield
into the hereafter.

Unable to pierce God, to fathom
his depths, she bargained for the others:

If you need a life, take mine. Then came

disintegrating veins,
her feet roped,
swollen purple;

the fall in Mexico, no words
to tell the doctor
he set the unbroken leg;

threatened blindness,
the chiseling of her eye sockets;

replacement of her color
by a blankness one
brain cell at a time.

This is the skin of the story
that held her together:

six children prospered.

When she broke her neck
on the stairs
after her last child's wedding,

she believed she had cracked
God's code:
what he meant by
marrow

in the bones.