

MARGO SWISS

Hatching of the Heart

*for my mother*

*I'm just being quiet*  
the thin line of your lips  
drawn over.

*just being quiet...*  
after years of war  
(long forgotten).

Lash of events  
against six-year-old scapulae  
made to strip bare before  
hands tore into a blur of  
eyes and teeth, unleashed  
to drive the point home –

the little upon the least.

In the bath after  
welts burn and blister  
raw to the touch;  
those long hot days when bladder  
scalds  
from dehydration of summer sweat,  
too many tears wept  
till eyes swelled.

Or night commands to  
*shut up your coughing:*  
throat ached trying to  
trying not to  
flinch in the way of  
drunken curse or  
hand slug in the face:  
*don't you dare*  
*talk back.*

One ragged sleeve of pain  
worn inside out  
so none saw  
the scream rolled up so tight  
you'd have to bite down  
to keep the cry in –  
swallowed whole  
(felt sometimes)  
forever....

Until the morning  
the angels came  
woke me breathless  
whispering my name:  
one day so near heavenly  
that everything  
for a time  
slowed down  
stood  
still

(heart beating in my mouth)  
saw the sun rise  
burst apart  
raining pure gold  
into my eyes  
tearing open wide the door  
to such a large fair green place:  
space enough to stand straight  
up in –

Remember then I said  
*mommy, I've seen God!*  
*I've seen God!*

*Margo Swiss teaches English and Creative Writing at York University. She edited an anthology, Poetry as Liturgy: An Anthology by Canadian Poets (The St. Thomas's Poetry Series, 2007), which received an Alcuin Society Award for book design and a special award from the Word Guild of Canada.*