

## WOMAN BELOW

She lowered herself, wishing the crawl space  
had another name. Something  
about descending past ground level always invoked  
a vague shadow from childhood. Glimpses  
of multi-legged movement made her pause.  
She attached her thoughts to color brochures  
of carpeted basements, not the gritty nap  
of scraped earth and its needy sound underfoot.

In an hour her guests were due. The image  
of Aunt Grace among them, nose and jowls twitching  
like a bloodhound's, lent urgency to her quest.

All the natural world was above, its solidness  
now a threat to her head for reversing the order.  
The center area, dug out to a six-foot depth,  
allowed her to stand straight, but she shrank  
as her own dark depths filled  
with cerebral excess and spinal lightning.

She suspected a mouse of spiting her immaculate home  
with its death. The stink was creeping upstairs,  
prying into every crevice. Her flashlight trembled  
as the cone of brightness followed old spider tracks  
behind the furnace. Her throat felt full of cobwebs;  
she swiped at real ones, the compulsion to flee  
coiled in every muscle.

Her frail beam found the offending rodent;  
she scooped it in a box.  
Retreating, her temple banged a solid beam.  
She was holding an icy compress  
when the door chime sounded.

Old nightmares hung in Aunt Grace's pupils.  
Flapping black sleeves reached to enfold her  
like wings fanning the smell of decay.

--Glenna Holloway,  
PUERTO del SOL, 1998