

## THE SPIRAL GALAXY

My mother used to dress up and go out the door  
in velvety clothes I thought felt like sky,  
smelling of moonlight as she swirled by me.  
I loved watching her fasten a diamond starburst  
on black or royal blue, right over her heart.

I'd get sent to my room for touching things  
she wore. Only Orion ever knew  
I got out of bed when the maid went to sleep,  
drawn to the magnetic field of my mother's closet.  
I'd wrap her sleeves and skirts around me,  
a caterpillar making a cocoon, and quiet as.  
By feel, I knew the color of each dress,  
every step of her room and the night it held.  
She kept her jewel box on top of her highboy,  
maroon satin cradling the pin I called  
my wishing star. If I could close my fingers  
on it once, all its magic would pass to me.

Standing on a chair, I couldn't quite reach it.  
One evening she changed her mind, took off  
her first dress, star and all, and put on  
something white. For once, I couldn't wait  
for her to leave. It was then my blood  
swarmed hot in my head, drained down suddenly;  
I felt myself floating to the floor like fog.

In Children's Hospital, the maid sat with me,  
nodding assurance between magazines and coffee.  
Feverless and home by mid-week, the brooch  
was no longer accessible. My magic theory  
faded like my virus.

Later I saw pictures in a book-- a supernova  
exploding, a spiral galaxy patterned  
like a spinning windmill. It pleased me to decide  
that's what became of my mother in the end  
when she stopped coming back at all. Sometimes  
I still think she's up there-- flaring star  
on black silk, pirouetting  
in the eye of luminosity, radiating sparks.

Now and then I go to the library and look,  
knowing the page number by heart. I gravitate  
to anything with arms that could sweep me in.