

ADELE GRAF
GIVEAWAY

I—A BLACK-AND-WHITE CAMEO

Whatever pressed this young girl against
this old woman must have lasted
just until the shutter snapped.
She already peers sideways
towards her escape.

At the right edge, a slim arm hangs
from a strip of sleeveless dress,
blends into fence posts.
On the left, a high brick wall.

Cropped so she shifts to the centre,
the thin old woman stares
to the right, the plump-cheeked
child looks to the left. A young woman
got snipped out.

Unknown people shut
in a tin frame sixty years ago.
Now left over
when my choir's yard sale ends.

II—THE YOUNG WOMAN UNSEEN PAST HER ARM

As if I don't have enough to do.
Yet again I bowed to family pressure
and took the child to visit the old woman.

Long trip there and back in one day.
Hard to keep a child's dress clean.

So I might as well humour the old woman
with a snapshot. Even crop it
so she appears in the middle.
I don't need to be there.

I'll bind her to the child
in this frame's endless oval.
Then we can wait a while
before we go see her again.

Now to clamp the frame's flanges
to thick cardboard backing.
Why bother with names
and the date we all know.

And if this oval zero remains
on the heap after we sell her things?
Who will be left to care?

III—THE OLD WOMAN IN HER BACKYARD

How kind of her to send me
this photograph. I'm pleased
she came with the child, though
I discerned a duty visit.

Naturally, I kept my eyes impassive
as this brown oval frame.

Right before the picture, I believe
I reached to hold the child's hands.
But she turned aside. Perhaps
my bony fingers frightened her.

One of my fists—veined, I know—
 stayed on top of her taut fingers.
 My other hand, badly knobbed,
 under her other palm.

Still, the child should know how
 to behave. It may not be my place
 to say so, but she's too big to fidget.

Yet right then, I was close enough
 to feel her bare arms. If only
 during their brief visit, these two warmed
 the yard like sunlight on phlox
 near the fence.

It's lovely to have this oval brooch.

What will become of it after I'm gone?

IV—THE YOUNG GIRL, NOW GROWN UP

Maybe I was four or five then.
 I squinted to the left,
 so I wouldn't have to see
 the old woman. Wouldn't
 any kid do that?

Before the camera clicked
 —cameras clicked then—
 I'm sure I tried to wrench
 my hands away. Fingers flat,
 so the old woman couldn't hold them.
 But her dry fingers clutched my wrist.

Look at the old woman's pompadour.
 My 1950s hair,
 side-parted with a barrette ...

Amazingly, the frame is almost
intact. Flanges never lifted.
Just a gouge mid-way up one side,
as if I'd clawed to pry
my way out of the photo.

Now this relic in the mail.
One part of me remembers that day
too well. Another part, not well
enough. Might as well drop this antique
on someone's yard sale table

though who would want it, I couldn't say.

WAITING ROOM

On opposite ends of a vinyl couch:
mother and daughter. An empty
space between them.

The mother (short hair cowlicked)
ventures a word, eyes locked ahead.
Waits for her daughter to turn to her.

Her daughter (hair cropped, cowlick gelled
and bleached) sits silent, gaze forward.
Rummages for her cell phone.

The daughter's eyes (behind square glasses)
don't see her mother's (glasses round).
From my vinyl chair, I watch them both.

Once that daughter (still on land phones)
I'm now sometimes that mother
who glances at her daughter's hand
while she rises alone for the nurse.
The daughter clenches her phone
and waits for this morning to end.

Soon mother and daughter leave
having settled me in their space.
No words among us for what
led to this waiting room.