

# Narrative Containing a Sentence from the Book of Job

Douglas Smith

The earth had an open mouth  
below your coffin,  
which contained the doll  
of your drowned body.  
Father, the mouth was  
dark, and I stared.

My mother, who did not cry,  
stood beside me,  
and then she fell to the earth.  
Dressed in black, the pastor  
read from a black book,  
his voice murmuring  
of a world beyond. He did not see  
the fall of her body  
away from me.

Father, I heard the pastor say,  
*For the thing which I greatly feared is  
come upon me,* and in my flesh  
I was changed. I could not  
move. My mother moved  
against the wet grass,  
and when she turned, her mouth  
open and without sound,  
green stains embraced  
her black dress.

I knew you were  
in the empty house  
of your coffin,  
waiting, listening.

Father, she moved against  
the earth, the light  
delicate and sliding  
in her dark hair,  
but I could not move  
to help her.  
The assembled mourners knew  
the figure of grief  
my mother made.  
Still, they left her  
beyond.

I helped her to rise, father.  
I stood above my mother's body,  
above the gathered flowers,  
and then I kneeled  
without prayer on the earth.  
I placed my small hands  
upon her, felt the bones  
beneath her flesh. For the first time,  
the weight of a life.

Know, father, if you can,  
that I whispered  
into my mother's ear,  
that I heard the rise and fall  
of her breath,  
that I felt her body shiver  
as she looked toward the mouth  
of your grave.  
Know, in the labyrinth  
of your abandon,  
that her muscles shifted  
beneath my open hands  
as I rose with my mother  
from the earth.