

## ON LAST VISITING MY SON ●

Lisa Low

*For Sam*

He doesn't hate me. That much I know is true. It's true, he doesn't have pictures of me on his walls, but his room is filled with aspects of me: as if he wanted to think of me indirectly, like Plato's shadows on a wall. His shelves are lined with the types of vases I long ago collected, and art is everywhere, bought at the kinds of shops I used to love to haunt, finding beautiful things that, hung on a wall, or placed stylized on a table, made the life of a single mother that much less unbearable. Speaking of beauty—my son. I want to put my arms around him. I want to hold him close. I want to whisper in his ears how sorry I am for all the things I've done: how I ran to the top of the stairs once, and dragged him by one arm down; how I ripped a toy from his hand and tore a string of flesh from his thigh; how once, in a rage, I slapped his face, though he stood no higher than my knee. Recently, at the back of a drawer, I found an old tape recorder, and sat delighted to listen to the past, at first remembering how we used to sit: he in the arc of my lap, my heart

beating in his ears; my chin at rest  
against this head; his feet in sneakers  
swinging freely. Thus we used to sit  
reading from his favorite books.

But on that particular day he must have  
done something wrong: moved a glass or  
touched a table mat carefully set, for  
my habit of rage struck out and I snapped  
at him and might almost have bit him,  
my voice changing suddenly from something  
soft and low to the sound a devil must  
make when he reaches up from hell. In  
slow words, through clenched teeth, furious  
as a witch, I howled: "Put that back!" How  
terrifying that voice, making tears spurt  
from my eyes to hear it now. How far  
more terrifying to the tiny ears of a child.