

## **The Junk Lady**

I wear gloves of sweat and hours,  
cleaning Jewel's little house with patient hands.  
Rooms and boxes filter slowly,  
sifting antique rubbish.  
More time spent reading yellow letters  
than with cleaning grime  
from spoons and lace and coins.  
What kind of value still exists  
in insect corpses, lost bottles?  
Propped on ledges, they glow and drip with light.

Ancient, sun-stained paper striped raw  
hangs off walls that leak dry plaster;  
tarnished kettles, pots, and pans  
rest on counters, nervous sway,  
easy clatter to be blamed with.  
I check items on the cleaning list  
made before I was born.

Jewel eyes like spotlights watch each movement  
but she never leaves her chair.  
Faded puppets swing from pegs;  
they don't know how long  
they've been living there,  
tilting, swaying on the wall.  
Hollow tones escape a lonely voice,  
telling me to vacuum  
'round priceless heirlooms  
in plastic boxes.  
Swollen ankles catch me staring;  
she feels the shame of years.

Wooden hearts are wrapped up tight  
inside Russian nesting dolls.  
Frozen faces painted yellow, black, and red,  
vacant smile, without a trace  
of what I thought was pretty once.  
Tin toys in boxes, never played with  
sleep so still in quiet dust.  
Blank spirits crowd an old lady,  
filling the house that is empty around her.