

THE SILENCE OF SUMMER

A man is shouting for help.
Late summer. In white shirt,
the sleeves rolled up above
the elbows, he stands with blood
dripping down his arm, over
one wrist, and onto the floor.
The druggist comes out from
behind the counter to raise
the slashed right arm and wrap
a tight roll of gauze around
and around. At each rotation
I see blood seeping through.
I know he's shouting because
I would be, as he sags
floorward his eyes roll back
into an inner vision
of peace. My aunt Belle
in her flowing cotton dress,
still single, still beautiful,
turns abruptly toward me, drops
her purse, and presses a hand
over her mouth to stifle
my name. When the cop arrives
the man is stretched out calmly
on the cool tile floor, his comb,
his coins and bills scattered,
his keys come to rest beside
the display of tooth powders,
brushes, little wooden picks.
Belle is on one knee, her eyes
enormous, brown, and childish,
imploring me to act, her hands
heavy on my eight-year-old
shoulders. Later, evening fell

slowly behind the maples
along our street. As the lights
flickered on I reenacted
my father's war on the green arm
of the sofa, whipping my mount
into battle. 1936,
new wars were brewing, people
I needed would vanish all
around me, but for now
I had my own work to do
as I spurred into the distance,
adult and unstoppable.