

Now the children are grown and gone.
Whenever I find the nestlings,
I place them gently in the apartment trash cans
so the neighborhood cats cannot torture them.
If they were to survive, they would build
their own nests in inappropriate places
and the cycle would continue.

I think of this when I watch the news
and see thousands upon thousands
of children dying from earthquakes,
floods, famines, drought, and disease,
because their parents could not find
a suitable place
to build their homes.

SOMETIMES BEING MANIC IS AN ASSET

All Julie wanted were some aspirin tablets
for her morning headache.
She asked at the nurses' station
and was told she could not have them
without her doctor's written consent.
"My doctor won't be in until tomorrow," said Julie.
"I'm SORRY!" snapped the nurse, annoyed at
being argued with. "Those are the RULES!"

"Are you telling me I can't have
TWO LOUSY ASPIRIN TABLETS?" shouted Julie,
beginning to shake and turn blue
at the corners of her mouth.
The nurse quickly backed away, holding up
her clipboard like a talisman.
"Don't yell at ME, young lady," she said
from the safer distance. "I don't make
the rules around here — I just work here!"

Julie spotted a small bottle of Bayer's
on the nurses' desk just inside the open window.
She grabbed it, shook out four tablets,
and replaced the bottle.
The nurse made no move to stop her
or to summon an attendant.
She liked her potted African violet
and the large color photo of her husband
too much to risk one of Julie's attacks.

Julie downed two of the aspirins
with a large swig of coffee
and put the other two in her jeans' pocket
for the next morning.
"I survived 100 capsules of 300-mg lithium,"

she shouted, making sure the nurse could hear,
"and that god-damned bitch tries to tell me
I can't have TWO FUCKING ASPIRINS!"

The next day there was a standing order
in Julie's file
that she could have two aspirin tablets
whenever she wanted.

THE LIFE YOU SAVE

The intern on duty
that night at County General
had never seen so much blood before —
it covered the victim's body
like a scarlet shawl —
it gushed from his open mouth,
his nostrils, from the torn aorta
exposed by an enormous ragged hole in his chest
like crimson water from a
marble florentine fountain.
He looked as if he'd been hit
by a mortar shell.
"That one's a goner," somebody said.

Night after night
the intern had watched the same scenario:
dozens of them, carried in by family,
by friends, by paramedics —
white, black, hispanic, asian,
still flaunting their colors, their tattoos,
their shimmering jewelry,
and their garish, oversized crucifixes.
They almost always died, surrounded by
weeping mothers and sisters
clutching Bibles and Rosary beads,
pleading, "Why, why, WHY?"

But this one was different.
Nobody came to weep for him.
He was only a kid — 16 at most —
with long blond hair
and a face like Michelangelo's "David."
He wore no colors, no jewelry,
not even an earring.
A victim of cross-fire, thought the intern,
the familiar rage eating at his stomach.
They stitched the aorta back into place,
sewed up the hole in his chest,
and wheeled him off to CCU to die.