

and smoother, cooler than satin,
the handle gardenia, magnolia, plumeria
and orange blossoms turned to bone
and when I divorced my husband,
even though he got the big things: the armoire,
the pool table and two cars, he took
my pearl-handled antique letter opener, too,
kept hidden in the secret drawer of my rolltop,
and even though I harped about it for months,
he wouldn't give it back, lied like my Uncle Jimmy
and said he didn't take it, dammit

and during those midnights
when I talk to my Grandma Nora,
those summer nights I can't sleep beneath
the cotton quilt she made me in 1972,
I say to her, "You weren't selfish, you weren't stingy,"
and she says, "Honey, you weren't selfish,
you weren't stingy."

But
just what is it
about those things
with pearl handles
that people
just can't keep
their hands off of?

VODKA VERACITY

Every Thanksgiving my sister-in-law Babsie
would get drunk on pink chablis and tell
the whole fam damily how her brother Bart
raped her for years when she was a little
girl and Bart would call her a damned liar
and everyone would get disgusted because
she had ruined everyone's fun and Babsie
would drink more and cry because no one
believed her not even her husband who sent her
to a psychiatrist who didn't believe her
either said she harbored secret incestuous
feelings for her tall, dark, handsome brother
so Babsie quit drinking pink chablis
and started drinking vodka so her husband
divorced her and took the kids but Babsie
was cute and married again right away
but her new husband didn't believe her
either because she was always drunk and
you can't believe half of what drunks
say so Babsie went to Betty Ford Clinic
where they sort of believed her
but told her to get on with her life

so Babsie started taking jugs of vodka
to motels for lost weekends the motel
manager banging on the door on Monday the
paramedics coming until Babsie's pancreas
was the size of Africa and then when
Bart's kids got grown they told
everyone how he'd raped them for years
even the boys.

TOUGHER THAN CORNED BEEF HASH

The only things my mother ever trusted
me to iron were the pillow cases she'd
made from that tough cotton airplane
covering she got when she worked
at Hughes Aircraft, so tough the
iron burn marks washed right out,
so tough I took them with me when
I married but stopped ironing them
because I had babies right away and
no time for a wrinkle-free life,
so tough years later after my divorce
not a hole one, and still crisp as
parchment but now with a yellow patina
that matched the amber wishfulness
of the Hippie Era.

Today I looked all over for them,
looked behind the old super-8 home movies
beneath the broken electric blankets
the 1978 calendar, the 1983 newspaper
of the day Gloria Swanson died
and couldn't find them,
those tough old pillow cases gone
without a hole one —
lost during the 90s' Save The Earth Era
just when I need them the most.

TASTE BUDS

My friend Kay and I loved our dogs,
hers a dachshund, mine a Dobie,
so much that we wanted them to
grow as healthy and happy as our
children so we began to make
homemade dog food of chopped
beef heart and kidney, chicken
gizzards, fish stock made from
trout heads and tails, garlic
(rumored to ward off fleas),
eggs (an emulsifier),