

## TOUCH

In a hospital morgue,  
I lay in a pine box  
propped up in a simple tiled room,  
with a curtain for privacy  
that blew open as each guest  
entered the chapel.

I wore an ivory silk shirt  
and held a pink rose.  
White satin covered me to the waist  
and was crudely stapled  
around the edges of the coffin.  
Then some morgue-men nudged the lid into place,  
tightened the screws with a ratchet brace  
that made a shrieking sound,  
melted wax over the screw-heads to seal them,  
and nailed a crucifix to the place  
over my mouth,  
or what had been my mouth.

On a hillside,  
they lowered me with ropes into rock,  
and those who looked  
glimpsed the buffed star on your coffin glinting in the black,  
instead of a sea of skulls.  
Then I lay down beside you,  
dissolving loneliness,  
and the white maggots wriggled.  
As the preacher spoke,  
no one seemed to hear him,  
tamping their eyes, touching one another.  
He wore a long black hooded robe  
and carried a staff,  
at the top of which two snakes  
hissed at one another.  
He crumbled dry soil over us.  
He seemed emotional.

Remember the canaries  
in the utility room off the kitchen,  
a mother and her offspring  
with yellow bodies and tick marks?  
Remember how they sang with their beaks closed  
when we set them free each night,  
listening and watching  
as they circled overhead  
in the bright lights that imitated daybreak?  
Remember the notes resembling bubbling water?  
What a fine performance they gave!  
Though they didn't know where they were going,  
they made their prettiest song of all.