

## Childhood Disease

Watching you from the doorway  
of your dried peanut butter and clothes-  
strewn room, your schoolgirl shape  
silhouetted beneath the quilt I made  
when you were still an abstract  
undulation of the abdomen,  
your face now puffed  
with hives, like scarlet letters,  
those mother-may-I eyes,  
that smile, sweet with tenderhooks  
to haul me in.

I watch myself, as in an old home movie,  
a girl of ten, shy and calculating,  
importunate to claim  
time of my working mother.  
I know the posturing well:  
the reproachful downturn of the lip,  
the words perched on the edge of the tongue,  
heart steeled against rejection.

Thus, gathering guilt and memory around me  
familiar as an old comforter,  
I sit down with you,  
lapsing into the part  
as easily as a veteran actress  
making her comeback.

~Sheila Collins