

FAMILY

throat bandaged my
 uncle in a dark room
 with photographs of
 relatives above his
 head appletree thru
 the window days with
 the door closed then
 on the porch on the
 glider green leaves
 spiraea wicker basket
 wicker chairs where
 he made up words to
 win word contests
 read about the blood
 the heart strange
 things in the body
 in medical books
 that grew damp
 in the august air
 the pages sticking
 together girls with
 damp thighs opening
 in the yellow roses
 maybe like those
 dirty gertie draw-
 ings he'd slap me
 down for reading on
 the same porch 35
 years later

1945

mallets bay the
 sun swallowed by
 champlain my
 sister and i on
 the screen porch
 hearing a story
 that will scare
 us even after we
 can't remember
 it the cousins
 are laughing a
 smell of damp
 flannel smoke
 fireflies in the
 plum leaves my
 mother's cigarette
 on the porch next
 door a firefly we
 don't stop watching

1945

downstairs the cats
 were giving birth
 in the coal bin my
 sister's birthmark
 growing under her
 yellow hair in a
 month the water in
 the cellar would be
 rising my mother
 stayed sending brownies
 to fort devon while
 one cat carried four
 kittens between her
 teeth up the wet
 stairs to the kitchen
 as my mother's hands
 gnawed each other
 bulletin of the fdr
 dying wind the old
 big brown zenith
 my mother in heels
 just standing in a
 ring of spilled flour

FAMILY

no more lying on the
 green chinese rug
 rolling tin foil
 listening for water
 in the conch shell
 no more trains no
 more men made out
 of clay no chinese
 chair with dragons
 no one singing blue
 birds over as the
 sun falls behind
 the hen house i'm
 in stanny's room i
 know my uncles will
 tuck me in my father
 rub my back when he
 comes from where my
 sister is getting
 ready is almost born