

RASPBERRY SOAP

After a while she had to be
helped to the shower where she
sat on a little metal chair
while her granddaughter, wearing
a bathing suit, washed her
close-cropped Auschwitz hair,
then gave to her the raspberry soap
so she could wash her private parts
and face herself, quickly, before
the pain came again, then after her
shower, quickly again, her granddaughter
had to tote what was left of her little
bag of bones back to bed where her
granddaughter dried her gently,
gently as if she were already dust
that might poof away, then dressed her
in clean cotton things, combed her
hair and then for a week my mother'd
lie there, white upon her sheets, a
ghost of a prisoner of war from some
very old war in the snow, the musk
and sour brandy of her living death
rising around her a halo of angel
aroma that only that raspberry soap
fragrance of a rainbow rain from
springtime forests could wash away.

—Joan Jobe Smith

Long Beach, CA

ONCE AGAIN MY VIPER-OF-A-PEN BITES BACK

on my week's list
i have written
"buy pants."

but even i have so much trouble
reading my handwriting
that at first i read it
"big pants."

well, yes, that too.