

expensive cream, two bottles of fluid that clear your nose just to see them, a bright pink filing board, and a blue scarf. She sits with her legs crossed at her dressing table with the radio on and taps her foot up and down beside the hole in the floor. Sometimes she sings, la la la la la, or she mutters the words at the tunes that are blunt from all the people who have listened to them. She beckons her fingers and holds her hand before her face and that pink emery board cuts backwards and forwards, atomising the nail, giving its fragments a chance to spin into space before they are turned to dust in the carpet at her feet. She sharpens her nails as she files them and they pinch my ear as she grabs it. "I said come back here," she says.

Her voice has changed now; she's pretending to be someone else. It's not her, and we don't know each other.

"This is for wilful disobedience," she says looking at her stick, carefully stating each syllable. I do not ask her to clarify.

She generally gets worked up enough after the first few strokes, but this time it takes quite a while. I tend to hop about, and this makes it worse. But if I stand still it takes her longer to stop. The almond blossom quivers in her hair and falls from her shoulders as we go round and round. She has me by the ear. On one side I can feel the cold rings on her knuckle as she pushes me into her. On the other is the coarse cotton of her slacks, and their leaping yellow lines open up and she pushes me through them, into her belly, trapping me there.

## JOAN PRIEST

### A DANGEROUS WORLD

Current crinkled in Olsen dreamt  
sequence, shoreline and sand  
throw strange quilted patterns,  
crabs skitter crazily  
one lowly ugarie (Plebidonax  
deltonides in laboratories  
only) is stranded.

Pressing survival buttons the shell  
opens warily, siphon protrudes,  
explores, withdraws — no water,  
no leverage — fate is decreeing  
dehydration or the bait bucket,  
call on Pythagoras, Babylon, Egypt!  
Will the seventh wave roll, reach out,  
mathematical, mystical? It does,  
the shell tilts, thrusts and is gone  
to safe caves of sand — a near thing

bringing to the watcher unwanted  
sharp reverberations  
of road crashing  
metal, earth spinning,  
order dissolving, shockwaves  
resounding, mortality pointing.

Hold fast to the morning,  
tranquil sea solace,  
walk on, and neatly sidestep  
a staring fish head.

## JAN OWEN

### GLOVES

Almost human,  
they flew off down the years,  
waving goodbye,  
fingertips chewed off, seams split,  
singly, in pairs,  
or rolled into fists for St Vincent de Paul.  
Sloughed skins, failed roles,