

## ISABEL HARTMANN

### CHECK MATE

It was still raining hard outside,  
So they'd postponed their picnic till next weekend  
and he'd set up a chess board and lit a fire,  
and altogether it was quite homely.

It's true, isn't it, she said, somewhat smugly,  
That the queen's the most powerful piece on the board,  
And can move, free-spirited, wherever she wishes.  
In a way, he replied, but the king's still *the* most important piece

The pristine bishops continued with oblique movements  
To wipe out their opposing congregations.

The king, she said, as she castled,  
Thinking about her English childhood,  
Just seems to plod along and be defended.  
I think of him as calculating, and prudent, he said.

She considered trying for a stalemate to finish the game,  
So she could sit by the fire and stroke the cat instead.

He thinks he's playing draughts, she thought,  
Just taking whatever he can with no regard for strategy.  
Fool, he was thinking. I've always beaten you at chess.  
I've beaten you at every game.

That night she slept dreaming of carefree chess pieces,  
And old English landscapes with sweet musty gardens,  
While he, with his king piece, his most important piece,  
Tried to penetrate her dreams.

But. Check.  
He'd have to move. Or rearrange.  
Or this time,  
He'd lose.

## INFUSION

She collected bits of herself from all over the bed.

A memory shattered.  
As a child she had been clumsy.  
If you break another cup, her mother had said,  
You'll have to pay for it.

Knives in a container, washed, pointed upward.  
She anchored her emotion.  
Romance fell into a sink full of dishes.  
For a long time the dishes were piled high.  
The night was flooded fragile.  
Silence smashed.  
Again, her mother.  
Her hands hurt.  
The water was warm,  
She was soaking in it.

He touched her gently. She couldn't feel anything.  
He kissed her again.  
Her mother was calling.  
The dishes in the sink fell to pieces.

You'll have to pay, her mother said.