

Ingrid Egeli  
Escapartist

I

Your body bends.  
Your ribcage contorts.  
You arch. You flex.  
You are a Houdini acrobat.

The kids play under you.  
They go skateboarding.  
They call their girlfriends.  
You twist

and lick the key  
inside your mouth.  
You are a freak.  
A performer.  
A vaudeville act.

You think someone  
will notice, but they don't.  
Others like you

contort to escape.

The kids went out  
to ride their bikes today.  
You have been  
maintaining this position

for years. The heating bill  
isn't paid, the electric bill.  
How will you buy milk to put in the fridge?  
Cereal.

You gaze in the mirror.  
There are marks on your neck.  
Cover the scars with make-up,  
and paint a smile back on your lips.

The boys asked for money today.  
They want to go to the movies.  
The bottom of your purse  
jingles.

II

In your dream, a bill collector  
has ropes, handcuffs,  
a buckle, a strap. She ties you  
up and down. You step  
inside her box

six feet under.

The kids run off to their friends  
and sink into their beds at night

not realizing that you

are trading your life for theirs,  
that you never had a life,  
that someone is coming.  
She clamps you in a

straight jacket tight.

The canvas chaffs your neck.

You are her spectacle  
and her audience.

You have leg irons too.

Your cheek presses  
against a stage floor.

You offer your neck, your arms,  
your body in exchange

for your children's bodies,  
their lean, muscular bodies  
that you birthed  
out of your own body.

Your children look to you.  
You clench your jaw.  
Grind your teeth.  
This will be  
your final act.

III

You don't hold your breath.  
You don't let them  
take their first.  
You push their bodies

back up into your birth canal,  
back up into your own body  
where it is calm,

safe, dark, warm.

You say to them:  
unlock your chains,  
escape my prison.  
Here I will show you

a trick: lick your tongue,  
push soft flesh against metal,  
hold your breath,  
kiss your brother,  
and pass him the key.