

## Tammy Armstrong

### Iris

She collects buttons in a  
small chocolate box: brass anchors,  
tamarack toggles, grease stained grains  
clinging to strips of fabric,  
sliced from Naval uniforms,  
school cardigans and baby wraps,  
kittens still smiling  
from spider fat beads of plastic-  
the only elements that kept over years.

She'll use them again.  
Hanging buttoned bolts of recollection  
loosely on lines,  
waiting for the pull  
away from the house;  
the seams weak  
where sparrows pluck  
to insulate bile stuck nests.

### Harvesting the Icefield

Stretched like a jagged scab,  
this field of muck and rock separates past from present.  
Unprepared for this ashen island of sheet ice,  
I stand in summer dress, shivering before a disposable camera eye-  
hot coffee offered only on the other side of the highway.

Clad in Gortex, you stand several yards away,  
fibreglass marker at your feet,  
waving in the space your ten year old body had occupied in '71.

'It's moved so far since I was small.'  
I nod, wrap my arms around my shoulders,  
wait for you to seal this onto a gummy page  
in your pocket-book consciousness,  
wait over a slough of candy wrappers and cigarette filters,  
empty film cartridges strewn like spent bullet shells-  
all crunched under the sneakers of children in bright raincoats.

### Paddock

They poke stiff napkins into empty coffee mugs,  
twist stir sticks into jagged tools while rooting  
through coffee dregs,

through shuffling conversations.  
My power is exerted while wiping clean chrome tables:  
each voice hushed, silenced  
as I pass close enough to brush a swinging leg,  
a stiff leather foot in seasonal hues.  
Their confidential gossip-  
knocked over my minimum wage job-  
barbs of discontent hedged  
into a designated smoking area.

## December

It snows while you sleep.  
The bags of trash like abscessed milk teeth  
shoulder each other over dented cans.  
The alley pulls licorice stick treads  
out to the street and wall-eyed lights.  
And the cat that hates mice  
scrunches itself like a worn throw pillow  
against the house siding  
as I sit here. Quietly.  
Waiting for you to slide open the door,  
peer through the blinds and sticky sleep  
at what your day holds-  
coffee mug held like a chalice  
toward the morning news.