

My finger between your small teeth
is a measure of trust, a game
we play when you are six
and I'm nine, the heady shrill of our laughter
canned in the tin hatchback
of our parents' Datsun 210, speeding
like a bullet through dusty middle Canada. Your
teeth, even in their infancy can slam
as suddenly as car doors, and we
test each other's threshold,
each other's luck.

On another summer car trip
through the locust heaven
of the Canadian prairies, close heat even
though the windows are down, mother warning
from the front seat that "it's always fun 'til
someone gets hurt." Father's eyes
squinting in the rear view mirror, the same
way you do. How could they have known
those early days before your heart
and mouth could think
to turn against me.

At a gas station in Indian Head, we stop
to wash the bugs from the radiator
and fill up on lime Crush. You and I wait
on the hood of the Datsun, our thin, white
legs touching. Look at me
you know me. I am the only one
who fits this description, the only one
who can read your mouth by touch.

I am your sister and these
are my nine-year-old fingers, tasting
of salt, of blood. The only one
who will love you like this.