

**Michael
Hallock**

Angel Bones

As thin from cancer as in those V-day snapshots
She proudly shows to me,
Her face smoothed, she swears, by Jesus,
My mother is beautiful at fifty-seven
And near to death in this unworthy Birmingham hotel.

Humming the Tennessee Waltz she paints
Her nails redder than the Pall Mall packs
She crumples into crude roses.
See, she says, nothing on the cuticles,
By which small grace she means to make her stand
In a room where drawn blinds filter
The last slits of hot summer light.

In a black kimono which smells of a terrible ardor
She hums and waltzes with a son who is afraid
To press her dust-filled body.

Her shoulder blades are sharp as fins,
Angel bones, she calls them.
It's all right, honey, she whispers,
Feel them, feel them growing.
And they do grow as her hug tightens
And so to save myself I keep the dance time
In loud, clumsy threes,
Staring at the metal dresser where pill bottles
Jumble like a miniature wrecked city.

In the mirror I see my mother turning.
The gold dragon woven into her dark silk gown
Leaps between her angel bones,
Its mouth shining, its body
Beginning to be folded into feathers.