

The Closing Crack

-Eileen Adele Hale

I come home at eleven-thirty at night, from AIDS Project LA,
The Writers Read, at Beyond Baroque.

I make oatmeal, and when it's done and
I get up to get it, I put the chicken in the broiler.
Eleven-thirty at night, and I'm cooking chicken.
I'm afraid the glass roasting pan will crack
in the oven, going in cold from the refrigerator.

I'm so hungry.

I pour raw wheat germ on my oatmeal and mix it in,
and almost pour it down my throat.

I want to write to Irene.

She was crying tonight, and I think

I know why,

and I want to write and ask,

are you okay?

Can I help?

I want to say Irene, I think the world is getting narrower;
it's getting harder to squeeze through
without touching.

It gets narrower at the place
where my husband dies,
and the crying I thought I could not do
in front of people
has nowhere else to go;
one afternoon
I stop on the sidewalk
with my daughter, just before the shoe store,
and weep and shake.

That's the beginning.

That narrow passage is a place of birth
and it shapes me.

After that I start getting mad at kittens
when they die.

When Bramble gives birth, I know she needs me there;
and she does.

The first one is quick, at six minutes to midnight,
and the second comes only ten minutes later;
but the second has a red streak down her back,
that is skin
and bone

that has not come around to meet itself;
and I know
I will take her to the vet in the morning
to be killed.
After an hour-and-a-half more of pushing,
Bramble is tired,
but the third one is getting close;
but it's nothing
but a sack of intestines
outside the belly,
and the next time it pushes out, hind legs,
stomach, and intestines,
I catch it with gauze and pull it slowly free. I tell Melissa,
it's bad; I tell her,
you don't want to see.

Life is
like that. Birth is like that. Death
is like that.
Love is like that.
The places get narrower and narrower,
but there's always the big huge light as you're squeezing through,
and the vastness on the other side.
Are you okay, Irene? Can I help?
We need each other, and I need you.
There isn't room not to touch
anymore.