

## POEM FOR THE SANDMAN

The child begins to walk  
toward her own private sleeping place.  
In the pocket of her bathrobe  
she clinches a hand grenade.  
She is lumbering through the lumberyard  
like a titmouse with goosebumps.  
She waves goodbye to the orthodox dart games.  
The noodle shops have returned  
to their antholes, gulp, and a single spoor  
has traveled all the way from Wichita  
to tuck her in and tell her a story.  
There, at a juvenile crossroads,  
livestock are dragging their saliva  
in a semicircle, it is like pulling taffy.  
The child stands there for a moment,  
sees herself as an ancient washerwoman  
playing bingo on Saturday nights.  
She, the child, is counting lemons  
and squirming before a quiz.  
She is standing in a vestibule,  
an airless, gravelly vestibule,  
when a hearse pulls up and offers her a lift.  
Audibly aching, she swerves to miss  
some typhoid victims (being shampooed by  
an uncle on furlough?) (who pampers her  
with infinitesimal sighs?) and bounces  
into bed at last as into a cedar bough.  
And the sandman stops playing pinball  
to mend her cocoon, to rinse her shroud.  
He has had his eye out for her all along.  
Her tired little soul could not survive another war.

*There is a stained glass quality of light in this poem - it's almost garish, but then it meticulously breaks my heart. Every time I read it, the poem invokes a most necessary silence.*

- Dan Chelotti