

# TINA BARR

## Date

Squares like in bingo are checked off  
on each carton lid: scrapings from  
fingernails, pubic curls. "Isobel Williams"  
I read: "Temple Hospital, January 13th, 1993."  
Someone took smears; a cop signed off.  
In the back room, a black slab with a sink.  
Brown glass bottles with red-edged labels  
line up. Jerry, my date, a forensic  
chemist, says the counter's usually covered  
in bloodied clothes. The floors are piled  
with garbage bags, some clear red plastic,  
some paper, so evidence won't decompose.  
I can see men's striped shirts, jeans,  
women's flowered blouses. Tags radiate  
in triplicate: white, pink, green. When  
he's working Jerry feeds drug samples  
with a syringe into a machine. He reads  
molecular scatter for the signatures  
of cocaine, amphetamine.

In college Geb took me to Eddie's.  
On the biker's coffee table, a gallon jar  
glistened with black beauties, the capsules  
behind glass like balls in a bubblegum  
machine, a jackpot beside a switchblade.  
In the Roundhouse vault, there's millions  
in drugs. Cops drop heat-sealed  
pouches in a drawer with a flip bottom,  
so they tip into a locked bin. When he  
goes to drug labs Jerry wears a mask;  
under his cheeks the filters look like tusks  
broken off. Geb's bite left a ring of hyphens;  
he grabbed my hair so my head banged each step,  
ripped the front of my turtleneck,  
like he was making rags,  
the ones all around me in red  
bio-hazardous waste bags.

## The Reading Room Deck

*He took out three girls who roomed together; she got the short straw & married him.* The foam crochets itself over and over while the ocean undoes itself to put its body on the beach. *John Jacob Astor*, the words, pressed ribbon in the wind. Rockweed's mustard & black laces spin and drift, leashed to granite flatbeds. The withdrawing water tamps itself into sand, gravity drawing down, the word *settlement* skeined and yanked like salt water taffy gliding in orbit on the arms of the pull machine. Below, stays clink against masts; a dozen gulls kite and fall. This wood porch hangs over the beach; a waitress in a white uniform brings me chowder, oyster crackers, butter balls. *My great aunt slept with her stepfather* is my unspoken sentence. A lobsterman churns in from his day; we attend our salads. The red nun bangs in his cut silk wake, lemon on my fingers.