

CRACKERS

Little packets, filched from diners, restaurants,
Saved from take-out orders
Crumbling in their graying plastic
Sinking to the bottom of every pocket.
Easy to carry, to hide, to slip
To a hungry child.
Who looks up to your loving face
With big, wondering eyes, needy.
Eyes that clutch and do not understand.

That world is not gone.
When I close my eyes in the silent blackness
The blackness that condemns me
That cries out from the depths of my pockets
Where now
Now

Crouch the crackers in their sealed bubble.
That dreary, striped pajama uniform
Still scratches at my neck
In cruel mockery of comfy warmth
And safe, cozy good-nights.
Its pockets always empty.

It matters not that I sleep these many years
In whatever least recalls
Those long-ago pajamas
On soft sheets beneath a glittering chandelier
Behind doors that lock and keep me safe.
For those eyes, forever a child's, sweet and innocent,
Still await
The most natural expectation of all – a mother's love
And protection.

Next time, I'll be ready.
Able to slip you something, so many crackers.
You'll be saved, your tiny hand resting now in mine,
As we stroll beneath the drifting leaves.