

Gail Harris / TWO POEMS

BUT MY SISTER, MY SISTER

how she became a bald-headed nun
and floated down the Mississippi
in every dream I had.
My sister in a horse and buggy
driving the whole team over a cliff
and her collarbone
that mended miraculously in a week.

We sat at the foot of the steps
beside the little elm
hating that photographer with the chin
that disappeared into his neck.
You should join a circus, you freak
my sister muttered under her breath
but we smiled for mummy and daddy
though inside our mouths our tongues
had shrivelled like salted slugs
at the thought of his lecher's eye
magnified by the lens
upon us in our schoolgirl's dress.

SHE RODE THE RIVERBOAT, I RANG THE BELL

Everywhere little steps led
To where we could not see.
It was a heartening journey, not like
The Magi's at all. Faces at every corner
Turned out to greet us, and Life's
Gardener, all trimmed and clipped to perfection,
Waved his green wand and re-seeded us.
She swung her legs up over the side, and dangled
Her long toes in the water that fled down river
To where it met the Mississippi.
I couldn't tell if she was weeping or laughing
When the ticket-boy told her
Our trip was nearly over. She clutched
My hand so tightly, though, I reminded myself
To look the next day for bruises.
They were there, too, but didn't matter,
For all that day was like a pale blue and yellow welt,
With the riverboat gone from our lives, with
Her hands spreading the jam
Calm, as if none of it had happened.