

JANET FRASER

## The One Who Stays

There are always, in each of us,  
those two; the one who stays,  
the one who goes away—Eleanor Wilner

I am the one  
who stays.

I said no  
to nursery school.  
Clung to Mommy's knees,  
did not let her pry away my hands.  
Stayed by her side  
in our apartment with the  
bamboo blinds and view  
of Lombardi poplars.  
Followed her to her bed  
when my baby sister  
fell asleep and held her limp  
body in my pudgy arms.

I said no  
to private girls' school.  
Walked home for lunch  
and ate Campbell's soup  
with my mother,  
caught the noon-hour  
gangster flick on TV  
while she washed  
diapers and sighed.

Sat on her lap  
on the spongy sofa  
and sang show tunes.

I said no to Big Cove  
summer camp.  
Read sexy books,  
swam in public pools  
with poor kids,  
chased Dad's golf balls,  
stayed late playing  
handball until Mom  
led me home  
to our apple orchard  
and a glass of creamy milk.

I said no  
to college in a town far away.  
Sauntered to university classes  
with girls I knew from school,  
played Varsity,  
stayed average.  
Caddied for Dad,  
dated males  
my own age, felt  
safe and reasonably  
comfortable in my skin.

I said no  
to nervous breakdowns  
and rested at home.  
I said no to flying  
to a remote location  
where no one found me.  
Said no  
and spent time with  
my father before he died,  
became my sister's  
best friend.

I am the one  
who says no and stays.  
No I am the one  
who wanted to say  
no I am the one  
who always goes away.