

**Pygmalion****I**

I a young man at loose ends, and she  
my sister's baby with whooping cough.  
Taking turns at her crib, jerking her  
upright each time another fit started  
we saved her — and so she caught me.

Three: climbing my lap, all ears  
under my jacket, hearing the thump,  
Five: riding behind me, arms tight  
round my waist, as far as they reached,  
Nine: skin over bones, all dark eyes  
but not quite so intriguing  
with a son of my own.

Fourteen: just starting to make people  
notice — we drank tea from one cup  
and I said there's true love but  
she knew it was only a half-joke.  
Seventeen: I talked, talked, while she,  
only half understanding,  
heard in that same language.

Nineteen: roles reversed, listening  
to her talk, talk, hearing confessions,  
lending advice I hated to give  
not quite out of the battlefield  
she had just entered.

Twenty one: I gave her away and she  
left me for good, taking me with her.

## II

It had something to do  
with saving my life or  
that was what he said.  
He was childless but  
loved children, so I  
was an obvious choice  
when you think about it.

But all I remember  
is my big solid uncle  
catching me up in his arms  
as I ran to him  
squeezing the breath  
from my cracking ribs.

Riding double behind him,  
lemonade and cookies  
at roadside cafes.

Taking trains  
to reach him and  
listen to monologues  
on life, love, the nature  
of things, all heart  
and only half mind.

Then, in love, always asking  
does this one  
measure up to that image  
I have of what a good man  
should be, meaning him.

In time I relaxed and I left him  
but he lives with me still  
and sometimes he comes  
between me and contentment.

—*Maria Jacobs*