

LEANNE AVERBACH

Reading the Signs

Her dog prances round
each time she puts on nice panties:
it means they're going out.

By the time her cirrus spills of silver
hair are bound into a warm bun
he's already dripping—he's old too—
with excitement; but it's memories
that drip steadily from her.

She was fifteen in Berlin
when the stars fell
onto sleeves; yellow points of dark
identity for Jews and other
degenerates. And she buried
her beloved flute in an overfed closet
before it could finger her family like a bone.
Before they could run halfway round
the sun, to Chile, where the hot earth
would not tell
one scorched soul from another.

There she grew
somehow under the blistering gloom
of her parents' hands
incanting over doorways
each parting a promise

to return, just live
 out the day, to marry only
 if she must, which she did,
 and bore a son
 straight and perfect as a flute
 with boiling blue eyes.

The world will eat you
 his grandparents warned
 from the shadows,
 and he strained to read
 the bleak signs
 their hands made as they spoke.

And then it came: *la Democracia!*
 Allende's corona to shrink the dark
 melt the doom
 from his grandparents
 and the bone-palmed children of Santiago;
 a promise, said the boy,
 of life after far too much death.

But they lived
 his young mother too
 to hear he had died in a stadium
 colossal tomb of stars
 during Pinochet games
 while a song shot from his throat
 as straight and perfect as a bullet.

Now her dog prances round each time
 she puts on nice panties:
 it means they're going out, or
 an earthquake is terribly near.
 Who can read the signs?