

Elaine Terranova

Peace

That he found such safety in a house, my nephew, I was glad to know. That the murmur of parents in the bedroom beside his soothed like the sound of the sea and he could finally let himself go, enter the dark passageway of sleep. Oh, it was something to envy. Something I had not experienced, kept up by my own parents' noisy squabbles. Even grown, my nephew said, he loved to spend the night at a married friend's, a house sanctified with a couple's sleep, especially where children lay near, tucked up in bed. And he told me about his night by the shore, at Mike's. So at peace, my nephew slept well into the morning of the next day, waking with the box of the ocean swinging toward him and away like the gulp of a first word he woke with in his mouth waiting to say. But no one was anywhere near. When he rose from the couch where he'd slept, the blinds were still drawn. He heard nothing, not the noise of TV or cries of a child finding itself suddenly alone in the day. They've all gone out, he decided. But the dishes lay stacked in the sink and wineglasses etched circles on the coffee table beside him where they'd been set down the night before. So eerie, so silent, it seemed to him after a while that something might truly be wrong. Maybe the gas had leaked from a pipeline and they all lay dead in their bedrooms above. He sat alone on the couch, not knowing what to do, when in the next half hour, his friend and his wife and the two little girls all drifted down to him, one by one. You should write this in a story, I told him. No, he said. To make it interesting, I'd have to say they had all really died.

Elaine Terranova has published seven collections of poetry, most recently *Perdido*. New poetry and prose appears in *Cincinnati Review*, *Hotel Amerika*, *APR*, *Valley Voices*, and *Mom Egg Review*. She has received a Pushcart Prize, a Pew Fellowship in the Arts, the Walt Whitman Award, and an NEA Fellowship in Literature.