

Parcel

by Philip F. Clark

You can look all you want
in the bag -- you won't find the past --
as your hands, furious with searching
parse the gems and stones, the porcelain
of memory: that group of days you laughed,
the few you held like rain inside, that opal
question constantly turning over in your palm.
The sex and sweat of younger years.

You reach and touch the sharps of recollection,
coming away blooded or healed. Skin
remembers its better days; the brunt of
a kiss in the middle of an answer before
it leaves your mouth. Scintillants, stones,
urge your fingers forth, turning each object,
"Is this it? Is this?" Macabre and moistened
borrowings hunker, loom, stretch

from dates unknown; unwired clocks whose
hands no longer tell time, but swell with gleanings,
hear ghosts leaning in, and like the last bell of what might
have been, you hear the knell of kindness
long before its cathedral voices -- a recessional --
barter better times. You come upon it:
the soft, off-kilter scrape of shell; its cut a common
pain, now softened, polished, purloined.

