

I struggled with words until T saw me crying over a book and tossed it away saying, daughter of color, what do you want with words. And it was T first gave me an easel and canvas and said, "Go." I fill a canvas, then another. The struggle of a lifetime freed. And then suddenly, more words, the word artist pops up in newspapers. My art is defined in words in newspapers. We flee these words; we blow town in T's van. We go to T's town, to T's house, meet T's friends, and there's a lot of them, it's overwhelming to somebody who has none. One of these friends says everybody envies me my closeness to T, but they don't know; nobody gets close to T, not really. I'm going to try, with my paintings to reach T's hidden soul. Bigger, bolder, vast monster paintings, at which T smiles and urges me further. Tricked, I'm tricked. To get close, forgotten as I attack new canvases. T brings somebody to our house, says he's a friend, says his name is Polo, says Polo's going to take pictures of my paintings. I do not hear. I am engrossed with my art and have no time for somebody else's. T leaves us to our visual arts and goes to save souls. The sunlight fades and we stop. Notice each other, talk. About T. Careful not to give more than we get. Wonder what T has said about us. Secrets? T enters with a booming laugh, kisses me, and praises my work, a hand on Polo's shoulder. Through T, I feel Polo, close, really close, closer than I have ever been to T. Polo feels it, too, We are like one. This done by T, I think. T points a light at

my easel and goes. Alone, Polo and I reach out, no we grab each other. Private privacies revealed. Strangers no more. In some ways both of us looking for T, as we find revealed, each, only each other. Violators of T's house we flee, my slashed painting is our note of farewell. We imagine T's discovery of our infidelity and are exhilarated by our shame. For weeks we hide in Polo's studio. We imagine every call every buzz every knock every sound to be T. Silent until the ringing stops we hide. One day I answer a desperate knocking, to find the mailman. I wonder if it any of those knocks was ever T. We emerge into the bright light. Two orphans crawling out of their bunker to find they are alone. That it is time to start again. But how to, without T? I try to paint in Polo's studio, but the strokes streak past the canvas and I smear the walls with lines of color. We see I need more space. The building next door is an abandoned hotel. Quiet for twenty years, dark, unopened and inviolate. We are violators, we know how to break and break in. Twenty years of cobweb lace comb our faces. Excited and frightened, we kiss, cling together, a moment just long enough to plant a human seedling inside of me. Dedication of love. We link the studio to this the first violated room of the Hotel Excelsior. We bring light and take away the quiet filth of twenty years of neglect. We do it for T. It is for me to recreate the rooms, to color and dress them with my art. Polo will record my progress. Take pictures. The first room. T's

photo copied a hundred times and papered to a wall. Smiling, wishing us well, no, mockery at our stupidity, no, loving us in spite of because of our frailty. We see each of these same hundred photos differently. I flood a room with light and bring to it my special art. Every inch, wall, ceiling, and floor artfully covered with stuff, paint, long forgotten items of hotel life, lace panties, sprayed with plastic and lain provocatively close to the skeletal remains of a long dead bird. I cut off my hair, leave it there. A season changes; the baby grows. I tire. Gone for days, Polo returns to say he has sold the photographs of the hotel. Our secret sold? A book to come he says. Book? What can he be thinking of? Me, he says. Our baby, he says. People want to know about this place. Unconvinced, I return to work on the last room. A patch work quilt affair, a room of texture, my blind man's room. I stuff and sew and staple each section to the exact spot where it should go. In the studio I see the photos that will go into the book. A shame, I think that the quilt room isn't represented; it is my best work. I put Polo's camera on the quilt room floor, my unspoken acceptance of the book. Our book. My name and minor fame bring notoriety. The city fathers investigate, forgive us for breaking and entering and give us a permit for an art show, my rooms, my art. Polo and I are there on opening day for the reception and to sign autographs. I hope the baby chooses another day to come. I dress. Enormous profile. The

town is there in full. Polo and I celebrated, love it. And then suddenly. T. Forgotten for a time. T. Holding a copy of our book for us to sign. I cannot speak, hardly write. Polo and I leave our table and follow through the hotel. The crowd whispers as each recognizes T from a photo copied a hundred times and papered on a wall. Polo is tense, but then T laughs. So we do, too. The room with my hair, T picks it up and takes it. A solemnity, this mystery. Outside, getting into the van T says, I like the part that was done for me, but the newer rooms are best.

We learn that we have become, sometime, free. My water breaks right there in the street. T and Polo lift me into the van; Polo holds me as our baby makes her effort to be born, extricate herself from me, cut the cord.