Epitaph For One Who Should Be Dead But Lives in California

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he could have loved her had he wanted to but love in his youth had always been rationed in conditional portions and he couldn’t give anyone (even her) anything he never had as if denying her could make him feel better and so she learned to live without anyone who might make rules, who might set a price for affection, who might want anything in return (which is entirely human) so she was always alone inside herself (like him) and the price he paid was not to have her innocent love admiration respect adoration which he could have had if only he had wanted this priceless gift but the price she paid was to be loved only from afar seen but never touched by those who would have given her all but lacked the golden key to her impenetrable heart the heart of a lonely child-woman wandering the ghostly halls of her nurseries and bur-
dened with questions and twisted per-
ception and intelligence beyond capac-
ity to understand the bogeymen and
nighttime apparitions of big hairy
hands and hard lips doing things sad
and cruel and always in the name of
love those hands and lips wrapping
themselves around her pudgy fingers
and cheeks and knotting themselves in
fine strands of hair and squeezing tiny
buttocks only just out of diapers and
cressing silky skin that one day may
have been milk-laden breasts suckling
a child of her own and forcing grease-
embedded fingers into tiny places
where one day she might have discover-
ered sensuality but not then not now
maybe not ever because today there is
an impenetrable wall between her and
the touch of anyone who might re-
mind her of the touch of a father who
could not give his child his love with-
out also stealing a piece of her soul.