

To A Poet

by Adrienne Rich

Ice splits under the metal
shovel another day
hazed light off fogged panes
cruelty of winter landlocked your life
wrapped round you in your twenties
an old bathrobe dragged down
with milkstains tearstains dust

Scraping eggcrust from the child's
dried dish skimming the skin
from cooled milk wringing diapers
Language floats at the vanishing-point
incarnate breathes the fluorescent bulb
primary states the scarred grain of the floor
and on the ceiling in torn plaster laughs *imago*

*and I have fears that you will cease to be
before your pen has glean'd your teeming brain*

for you are not a suicide
but no-one calls this murder
Small mouths, needy, suck you: *This is love*

I write this not for you
who fight to write your own
words fighting up the falls
but for another woman dumb
with loneliness dust seeping plastic bags
with children in a house
where language floats and spins
abortion in
the bowl

(1974)

[from *Dream of a Common Language: Poems, 1974-1977* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978)]