Winner of the 2004 Provost Literary Award

A Dream
Kevin Hockett

Young college ladies, wearing faded jeans
and loud heels, keep themselves for other men.

Their cheeks are ripe and red, they're snowy at
the edge. Each set of eyes against the rest
of the room remind me of times wasted—
I acted like I wasn't interested

in seeing them dress their skin in my sheets
and hands. Now in my room they sit quiet

like winter afternoons: sunny but cold
and motionless. One begins humming old

songs Gypsies might sing, filled out in colors
and greed. I'm poor and asking kindly for

some charity. They seem not to notice.
Outside the street is vacant, light and iced

in afternoon air stirring confetti
over manholes, soft blue and pale bone white.

Through every closed shop winter crawls: a small
yet muting draft. If they are there, they're dull
around the eyes and numb in feet, the old
patrons of bars and hardware stores, not dead.

They will be soon. Their mouths stay shut as clam
shells: quiet and hard. I remember my room;
the young ladies, the white curtains
the desk, bolted to the floor, their small feet, scents
of cheap peach perfume, button-up
thin blouses, pink and flowered, darkened lips.

Camphor and talc thicken the air like flour.
The women cough and hold white lace and sour
small napkins to their mouths. They look to me
as if to say I was too safe, I came
too late and younger men with arched
feet took less time. They sit and watch
me fumble arthritic knuckles in bed.
They watch and smile, they laugh and turn their heads.