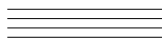


T H E S I N K H O L E



D E V I N J O H N S T O N

Unclenched and half asleep –
bloodstream tinged with melatonin,
the hormonal expression of darkness –
I lie still, listening to a soft
persistent tapping at the baseboard,
*the little sounds that demand nothing,
ordain nothing, explain nothing . . .*
A mouse worries a curl of wire.
The house settles a hair's breadth,
ground giving way far below
in a bed of porous limestone.
And through the stone, a cavern
meanders for a mile or so
to Uhrig's Cave, a dank saloon
strung with lights, where the chorus sings,
We sail the ocean blue.
A stream of cold air, redolent of soil,
leads on through a mushroom farm
to swimming pools of wet clay,
penates of brick, and bones
of prehistoric peccaries.
The entrances have long been lost
in basements, behind furnaces,
or sealed with highway rubble.
These birdless regions now permit
no traffic with the surface
but for the secret course of water
and low tones of a gallon jug.

*I see my mother's ghost among the dead,
sitting in silence near the blood.
Not once has she glanced this way or spoken:
does she not recognize her son?*

Thick drops beat against the glass.
The ceiling plaster ticks, a sound as soft
as a struck match or shutter click.
As my head begins to settle,
days flash behind my lids
without sound – *Lampyridae*,
the cold and shining ones.