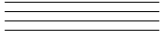


P A S T R Y L E V E L



M A R Y J O S A L T E R

I was gazing out back
at the lemon-gold
sun on the cream-colored painted brick
of the new house.

(New again, I mean.
I've told you the story –
that it was finished just a few
months shy of the war;

that young families
moved in and out before a widow
who couldn't care for it any more
signed it over to me,

a single buyer lately
possessed by self-
possession.) This morning
at my writing table, looking

outward for a word,
in that sun-glaze on the wall
I saw again a baker's shelf
twenty years ago in Paris.

You were there, of course.
The average American
four-year-old girl
stands at forty inches tall,

if you can get her
to stand still.
When you were four,
in those ruffled French dresses

I couldn't help spending
a fortune on,
you couldn't be kept away
from patisserie

after patisserie;
you guided me by the hand
to every window display
that we might inspect another batch

of little pleated
tartes au citron,
glistening neatly
at the level of your eye.

Remember when
you, your sister,
your father and I
all spoke the same language?

Because of you
we invented a phrase –
“pastry level” –
to indicate the height of any

four-year-old on the street . . .
It seemed to go without saying
we'd be strolling together
all the rest of our days.