

CRYSTAL HURDLE

## Arithmetic

He and his wife  
My husband and I  
share the language of sighs:  
Basal thermometer  
Cervical mucous  
Optimal insemination  
Invitrofertilization

At work, by the coffee machine  
while I drink herbal tea  
he and I exchange  
stories of humiliation  
Fecal smells of offices  
Baby pictures a wounding slap  
A crying shame, we agree

He tells of the dog-eared Penthouses  
and the ignominy  
of the plastic cup  
as at a wine tasting  
labelled and dated  
How soon before it goes bad?  
What's the bouquet?  
How fruity?  
An acrid undertone  
We laugh

I tell of the metallic probings  
clinical latex fingers  
cramps in the thighs  
from clenching after  
positively acrobatic.  
The unhappy couplings of sex  
on a schedule, failing

Our outrage turns to smiles of complicity  
After so much revelation  
we are suddenly shy

He refills my cup and  
I notice how the golden hairs  
on his hands catch the light

All so capricious, so fickle  
A matter of faith or faithlessness?  
Just a question of multiplication or division?  
Perhaps simply the wrong equation.

His two hands might lovingly cradle  
our newborn's head.