

Cindy King

even now.

Sprawled in the fluorescence of my prison cell
I reread the words scrawled across a slip
of paper. My son writes of William Penn,
another good man jailed, and I picture stocks
crayoned in brown, a timber frame with round
cuts for head and hands, on his book report.

A schoolboy now, he has recess and report
cards, though an inmate of his crib's tiny cell
only yesterday, where he studied the round
and round motion of pastel sheep. I, too, slip
into sleep, counting candy-colored livestock
as it leaps the low gate of his play pen.

Crafty Convict Escapes State Pen
headlines my imaginary news report.
Improbable, still I invent a smiling stock
clerk, carefree and more than willing to sell
whatever miracles would help me slip
off before the guard makes his next round.

Memories overlap like voices in a round,
some singing light, lovely as down on a pen,
my wife in her stockings and half-slip
in the flicker of the nightly market report.
At the stove, she checks a can for the sell-
by date, empties its contents into a stock

pot. She cares nothing for the stock
market, knows nothing of its round
about ways. The shares I didn't sell
plummeted like plumes, worthless pen
feathers. The income I failed to report,
money owed in back taxes. I always slip

up when recalling that night. Illicit details slip
away, but the lawful stay, officers taking stock
of my situation, one writing a police report,
another knocking on doors, trying to round
up witnesses, a woman idly chewing a pen
cap between words softly spoken to a cell-

phone. My finger's slip fired the round,
stock to shoulder, nerves sharp as a pen
knife. The report echoes in my every cell.