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The Women Regents of the Harlem Almshouse

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The Women Regents of the Harlem Almshouse

JULIE JEWETT

The almshouse matrons sit, wearing their
broad, smooth collars and shirt cuffs like
placques hung on a wall
declaring this almshouse to be "The
cleanest in all of the Netherlands," or recipient of
"1664's Best Place for Old Men to Go to Die"

Did all those poor men see these women as angels,
with their white collars and faces like candle flames
flickering up out of the darkness
Did they look with eyes straining
upward from their bowed heads,
at each woman, as each cutting gaze met their own

And when those women looked back at some
peasant or pauper with trembling hands held
tight to his stomach, did their expressions change
at all, or remain fixed as if
carved out of granite

Flying Back

BETH TURNER AYERS

The grackles
Seem ever present
With their squawk
And the splat
Baking on my windshield
But their feathers shine
In bright sun
Like circles in oily puddles
A shimmering rainbow
Shattered with a squawk
A piece of my past glides by
In a graceful dive across the road
The memory circles to perch
High, alone on a wire
Split tail feathers speak to me
Of happy Oklahoma springs
Thoughts of days gone by
Shattered by a squawk
The scissor-tail flycatcher
Lifts away from Texas grackles
The search for a mate continues
On a journey toward home