



UNIVERSITY OF
SAN FRANCISCO

Gleeson Library |
Geschke Center

June 2014

"Bust," "Working in Flour"

Jeff Friedman

Follow this and additional works at: <http://repository.usfca.edu/ontarioreview>



Part of the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Friedman, Jeff (2014) "'Bust,' 'Working in Flour,'" *Ontario Review*: Vol. 68, Article 25.

Available at: <http://repository.usfca.edu/ontarioreview/vol68/iss1/25>

For more information, please contact southern@usfca.edu.

Two Poems

JEFF FRIEDMAN

Bust

"My bust, my bust,"
my eldest sister cries
and crosses her arms over her chest,

as my other sister twists
free, flailing her arms,
losing only a small

clump of hair, her brunette
curls drifting down over
shards of blue roses.

The porcelain candy dish
has wings, but it crashes into the piano.
The metal rooster collapses on the carpet.

The TV picture rolls.
Moses falls from the clouds
with a legion of voices burning on his lips,

the tablets cracked.
Ashtrays ride the wind into the wall.
Hidden behind the ottoman,

I survey the damage:
One howls her foot is broken,
and the other cradles her breasts

like chipped saucers,
like screaming babies.
Home at last, my mother

crunches glass with her heels,
 and my father, like Moses, "gnashes
 his teeth," threatens to make

someone pay for this —
 until my sister faints,
 falling into the carpet with the pain,

her bruised breasts
 pointed toward the heavens,
 and my other sister sobs, "I won't apologize,"

while I duck behind her and kneel,
 hoping to escape punishment
 for staying up too late,

for sitting on the floor with a glass,
 for opening a door at the wrong time,
 letting the demons in.

Working in Flour

When I walked into the bakery at my usual time asking politely for two marble cookies, a fudgy chocolate drop rising from the chocolate swirls, Ida Kaminsky, who came from strong Russian stock — a hearty vegetable stew, spicy meats rolled in cooked cabbage — winked and asked if I wanted a job. She offered me two bucks an hour, half off on the marble cookies, and anything not sold at the end of the day might also be mine. I put on an apron, pushed through the swinging doors to help the bakers. The smell of flour was thick and tree pollen spotted the windows. Tall and freckled, Max, the other assistant, squeezed my hand, "I'll show you what to do." He taught me how to use the cake decorator, how to prepare the éclairs and put them in their doilies, then pointed out the brooms and mops, the industrial strength cleansers, the double sink with rubber hoses coiled in it. "You don't want paste to harden in the bowls." From across the room, where he scooped chocolate chip cookie batter onto a baking tray, Julius, the baker, snapped, "Make sure you tell him. Everything has to be spick-and-span." The flies heard him and flew off the lip of the sink toward the light fixtures. Soon I began sneezing, my hapless a-choos running down spotted walls, glistening on my face and hands as I pumped custard through a nozzle into the delicate éclair rolls. Later, when I worked on cleaning the floors, Max yelled at me for spreading the dirt in circles with my mop. I stepped back, kicking over the bucket of lye, all in a day's work, I thought. The next morning, Ida Kaminsky cornered me,

"I liked you better as a customer." I folded
my apron neatly without arguing back
picked up my bag of cookies
and walked out into the bright spring air,
where now I understood my mother's comment,
"You're allergic to work" and where, for a moment,
I stopped sneezing.