

Forbidden Glass

A young woman peers into the glass case
At the wooden coffin lid of Isis.
The exhibit catalog says Isis is
Wife of Kha-bekhnet, son of Sen-nedjem.
There are painted lines for the folds of her gown,
Two round knobs in the lobes of her ear.
Her painted hands clasp a cluster
Of swirled green lines and bell shapes,
Enhanced, of course, by the gown's whiteness.

The carefully groomed guide requests
That the visitors should please not touch
The glass of the display cases.

The young woman passes on to see the golden geese
Whose backs are set with lapis lazuli.
They turn their necks to gaze behind them.
Carved in the bottom of a blue bowl, a fish swims.
A girl walks lightly among the lilies of the Nile.
Folds in her linen gown round over her breasts and thighs.
She wears two gold pieces in her ears,
And in her hands she carries hollyhocks.
To die so young like a yearling goose
Slaughtered on the temple altars of Ra,
To live as a swan bending its neck among the lilies.

The young woman returns to see Isis.
She leans near, placing a hand on the glass.

—Cara Bullinger