

LYNN P. ELWELL

WASHING THE BONES

The other night after a meal of hearty chicken soup
I fished-out the segments of bone that had surrendered
their flavors for our great pleasure and well-being.

I put them in a saucer, added soap and washed them
until the ivory perfection of their surface was revealed.
My wife looked at me askance and asked, *Why are you
washing those bones?* I deflected her question—
it had simply seemed the proper thing to do.

I grow increasingly captive to the imperatives of aging,
to the quest for comfort and assurance. Like a fussy
mother spider, I scurry about attending to my private
universe: cobwebs in the corners, crooked pictures,
eroded mortar between chimney bricks.

But washing the bones seemed to go beyond these habits
of tidiness and order. Somehow more primal, an instinct
tinged with the aura of ritual and solemnity—a murmured
homage to the summing-up of my life.