**Hidden Prey** *by Sheila Aldous*

You ran wild once. Your slant of orange eye,

keen and watching, your dagger-sharp

teeth, pungent with the stink of killing.

Any prey would do in your scrabbling

to be pulled into a planned sarcophagus.

Any fence could be navigated, ripped,

scrambled, gnawed. No bird, hen, vole

or mole would escape. It was an art form:

a game before dinner.

Hidden, you watched the clock until

night fell, skirted fields sedged

and hedged, abandoned frequented

ways until the trap disguised of iron

and spike took you with leaves and twigs.

And you blared in the agony, whimpered

when forced to smell your own blood, before

you were clubbed until your senses made none

and you were dragged and rolled into a sack

to lie hidden in a pit already prepared and dug.

Until the day I surveyed my new land to build

a pond where I could play. I drew, sketched,

planned, priced the lot. I plotted a garden to be

decorated with ferns, rocks, stones,

fountains with water lilies to float on top.

I toiled all day, shoved in my spade until it moaned

and the soil was carved and aching. And then

it gave you up. I became obsessed, counted

your tiny fragments, your picked-over bones,

thought of all the ways I could display you.

Your ribs one way, femurs crossed and latticed

or lined up, your tail bones linked in a circle or

in a wide curve, your skull, devoid of eyes I wished

I’d seen, to be a captivating centrepiece.

I placed you in my gracious hall, on a wall, under

glass in a frame, and admired the portrait I’d made,

your avarice for the kill. I could smell the blood.

And in the ornate mirror, inherited

from my mother, my eyes squinted

orange in the sun.