

Poplar Catkins

ALAN SOLDOSKY

A wiry stem jointed
in the middle, and half
the way up another joint
where a branch begins, even thinner,

subdividing into clusters of catkins,
their heads bent. Their tiny, succulent spikes
sporting pollen. The dry grains
fall upon my fingertips,

my lips almost sticky from them.
And in the topmost places
white threads radiate, like the hair
on a boy's cheek, ready

to catch the sea breeze
that makes the stalk shake and tremble;
all that frail fury dried out
in the fields of late afternoon heat.

The heads so heavy they lull back,
overfilled with a dead
sweetness, the after-odor of flowers,
flakes of seeds, dark swords of fruit

thinner than pen points .
The stem, a green whip that could
be woven into a wand of flame
It says how our names would perish:

Marie, Ida, Russell, Naomi. Kept alive
by us; monotones of flesh,
memorized. We drop our seeds
each season, fields of us

flourishing as dust that

drifts down the coastline of heaven.

Published in *Manoa* – Volume 6, Number 1 – Summer 1994