

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 8 | Issue 1

Article 34

June 2008

K Crucis Cluster

Wendy Barker

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Recommended Citation

Barker, Wendy (2008) "K Crucis Cluster," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 34.
Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol8/iss1/34>

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Barker: K Crucis Cluster

K CRUCIS CLUSTER
Wendy Barker

A ring of stars, a crown
of lights, a necklace.
Pearls, lambent on a strand
like my mother's, the ropes
she wanted us to wear,
her gleaming jade, cool
in the hand, on the throat.
These are new stars, as stars go.
The pearls are cultured, from Japan,
the jade from China, before the War.
Our last dinner, she'd weighted
her fingers, bony chest, her ears.
Erect as always, that body
didn't bend under all those stones.
The Milky Way weaves through
this constellation, south of which
a nebula, black rent, absorbs
the light from stars beyond.
When she died, we twisted loose
her diamond earrings, opal ring.
At the end, we'd heard only
her breathing, slower and
slower till we were left with
her mouth agape, a silent
ring of flesh, the teeth inside
a space too dark to see.