

Sherry O'Keefe (Faber)

Approaching Strangers

He leaves town with a loaf of Wonder bread
on the floorboards of the van, a Peter Pan
jar sitting in the seat beside him.
He stops when he sees me walking
after supper, as agreed, dog leashed
to one hand, my hop scotching daughter tugging
on the other. He tells us he is lost.
I reach through the window as though to draw
a map in the margin of yesterday's newspaper.
How to get to where you never wanted to go.
I'm at a loss for casual words
so as he thanks me in his goodbye voice
I write *turn left after the last stop sign.*

Gas Station Guy

Tony, the gas station man,
names our weather. Sometimes I stop
for a quart of oil I don't need
just to hear him say, "There is a touch of Seattle
in the air today, but tomorrow Phoenix
will blow in." He shook his head 'no' when I asked
if he ever wished he could breathe
the real Pacific; feel the Arizona heat. The trick
to life, he said, is to like it where you live.

His Mid-Life Accent

Ever since that girl with *Tobacco Rose*
tattooed along her thigh and coy accents
for words like *hard* and *come* and *more*,
his is a life with one pot, one pan,
one coat hook on the wall. No need for closets
with winter coats, kids pressing
angels in the snow, traded
for parrots thrashing in palm trees, strewn
lilies along the beach from someone's midnight
vows. He gathers these abandoned stalks- wonders
could he call, could he say *regret* and how
he missed holding her wintered hands, all
the while hoping she'd take him back
with words like yes baby yes come *home*.

Even on Monday

she spreads bitter jam across her Sunday
toast, sitting in her kitchen staring out
at her neighbor's vacant lot.
If you want, take a left on Zanzibar
and drive that cul-de-sac. Hers is the house
with the black front door. Hers
is the face at the window
watching for your wave. But
I'll tell you now, don't bother.
She never gives out what she wants
back. It's best if you don't go there.
Sometimes, though, I send her
post cards from places I invent.
Sand dunes in Chicago. Laguna
glacial fields. *Dear Mother, I write,
Where I am, they make sweet jam. Did you
get the jar I sent you?*