

DESTINATIONS

For Jenny Smagala Luciano

It was never meant to be a practical guide,
if you are both blessed and cursed
to live from one surprise to the next.

In truth, you prefer the out-of-the-way places
to the paved land bridge across
what is always visible and taken for granted.

The unseen dots eventually connect
and make one wary of hope:
the lump that should not be there
or the hesitant look that comes too late.

Children have taught you to accept
gratitude over happiness,
as you faithfully follow the heart's traceable map
of far dreams leading ever away

but always returning home.

HOMECOMING

Nothing has ever kept me home.
Somehow every train or bus
has always departed without regret.
Going becomes the habit of all travelers,
and I've been away too long
for the scenery to remind me
that there was after all
a point of departure.

This is not to say I believe
your waving hand means anything
more than we think it does.
Only a man who is likewise uncertain
of returning can see the packed suitcases
in your eyes, the smile in need of assurance
arriving right on schedule to greet me,
as though you had been waiting all along.

SNOW

Saigon

The photograph is badly smudged,
most of the girls are lost forever,
with the missing half torn away
years ago.

Their poses would have been what
you'd expect: a lineup before
the orphanage wall, the starched
jumpers, the disposing faces of
the nuns; except for the lone girl
at the end, not holding anyone's hand.

Unsmiling, her eyes look
fitfully into yours.

Below her, someone has written,

Antoinette-Snow

Hors le péché original.

Paris

In the embassy garden, she stared at you

like a girl cornered by passion
for the first time, then smiled,

certain.

All winter she became the likeness
you had always believed in.

That last night you flew across
the Channel and watched the moon
light her face, her white camisole,
like a final memory.

Saigon

It was as though you had completed
a nightmare begun long ago
by finding the picture's vanished half:
the row of girls aren't even
looking at the camera.

They are turned toward her, each
holds the hand of the other.

Last in this succession, a nun, who
reaches for a frightened girl's arm.

McLean, Virginia

From a file you take a smudged,
torn photo of a girl so beautiful
it is as if she came into the world
without parents.

More than a lifetime has passed
since she was pulled back into
that atavistic light.

Then, too, a shutter closed
and left you this: a past

already developing into your future,
a contrast of black and white,
gray resemblances,
and love flattened paper-thin.

OLD MAN THINKING OF SMALL BREASTS

Forty years from now,
will there be another man
lost in an orchard that
has grown up around him?

To have known him all his life
and have it come to this:
watching him covet the small
roundish fruit of the trees.

His dry lips cracking all the while.
The wrinkled hands holding the
speckled skin, feeling its suppleness.
The mind daydreaming, grasping at
anything but firm. Thinking hard
hurts the teeth.