

## Three Weeks After Christmas in York Nebraska

Morning,

I watch the sun slowly lift over the soccer practice-field,  
turning each brown blade into a single flame that burns the  
black night to pale ash.

A single bare oak stretches toward  
a blue sky where wings  
heave in unison to weight its arms like plump,  
black winter-fruit.

The most recent snow lies heavy along the sides  
of the streets, ready to dissolve into the first hint of a  
south wind.

Hulitt Hall stands at the corner of the college campus  
with all its eyes empty, the mortar  
of its porous bricks tentative as it looks beyond the  
houses to harvested fields that I imagine once  
swayed like a living sea with the coming of April.

My grandfather moved here from  
Arkansas and huddles over steaming cups of black coffee, testing the  
wind outside with misty eyes. I believe he sees mostly things that  
have already passed. Now he waits, doubtful of their return.

Ila Key moves slower each year  
inside the house where she is forever  
rearranging pictures of children, grand children and  
weddings.  
She knots her clumsy knuckles to knit butterfly afghans  
for straighter shoulders.

Tom came back from "Desert Storm."  
He and Denise will rest by a fire this evening, listening  
to public radio.

Sheryl, my wife, cocoons our daughter  
in warm cotton blankets. waiting to release her fragile,  
pink-fingers onto a green lawn.

There is a man who wandered in off the interstate  
and stayed.

He wears a trash-bag hood and no socks  
and I wonder if his toes are blackening  
    one by one  
beneath his stiff leather tennis shoes.

I don't know his name.

My house wears empty colored bulbs  
    clacking on thin wires, swaying against staples  
    in the eaves and  
my town is full of dumpsters, open-mouthed with  
rotting spruce and pine and broken mirrored globes.

My dreams are jarred at night by the swing that  
    bumps our porch rail. I sit up,  
    listening to the wind howl at just the right angle  
    to play the rain-gutter outside our window like a  
bottle-top.