Linda Sillito

Trip Toward Prayer

You can't pray with a clenched brain Or fall asleep with fisted hands; But force one finger open at a time Until thoughts clatter loose and fall Like budded balls of crumpled paper.

Focus on God: O vast, universal wall on which I bounce my head and words; which catches every other prayer spattered with tears, and returns the rest rebounding on my ears.

> A child bored in church, I'd climb on to my daddy's lap saying, "Hold me." Then cleverly feign sleep, furtively turning the lead in his mechanical pencil, flipping his tie clasp.

Hear my sincere prayer when I have phrased an eloquence of motivating words.

> What words can you impress on the law? While speeding a shouting baby toward an overdue nap

> a red light flashes a sickening through my feet.

Officer, sir, after you citate me,

wordlessly berate me,

glaring at the peace sign in the window,

remember you are not the only one who hates me;

as traffic peers around us, for a moment only,

with uniform authority, hold me.

and the second second

Yet we know one another somewhat; since the time when as a threshold girl I found that if I prayed for what I most loved You'd take it — to make me strong, they said. Weak since that time, I pray for less, and though I know You know I know You know I know You know, I am content with all things given, overwhelmed with love.

> Sleep, little one. Lord, don't let this first warmth be the beginning of measles. I hate this creaking chair of so many hours, the vulgar, noisy trains. Go to sleep! I'll blow my morning midterm. Can't you at eleven little months, understand? I press her closer, kiss her kitten hair, and think of mental hospitals where people safe in separate cells can scream and scream their voices into salt. The thought relaxes us both, held asleep in the moving chair.

Giver of all I can give away – no, more than that; for you once granted forgiveness and reward on subsequent days. I have not forgotten.

> Soon the drab morning and this stupid, stupid war, which though it does not touch us most directly, still we wear a similar uniform of human skin which stinks with the blood of our many-sized brothers.

My love,

The baby has the measles after all . . . a term paper due tomorrow . . . About your adjustment to military life . . . Cease this cheerful written chatter. Listen, let me say this — I can't take it anymore I can't take it

hold me!

This baby and this man infinitely dear, Bless them all you can.

A single light ray pricks the palm of my brain Informing it with wonder — a word of love With forgotten implications, most simple, most complete. Yes, it was the first word you taught me To say with pre-flesh lips Clearly and with love, Lost in contending Wall, Giver, Forgiver,

Yet I lift it to thee now with new light that word father, Father.

Hold me.