

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 cite 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.

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.

