

SAINT FRANCIS OF THE PASSMORE

Being reticent he is easy
with stray cats and Karl Marx.
Slipping through the creaking
red door into the shadowed
chaos of the courtyard,
the dialectic mewing
greedily at his feet,
two bowls of milk balanced
in one hand, he smiles,
certain of small things.

Just home from the grave
yard shift, the Saturday
sun catches him unprepared.
Out of habit he shields
his eyes. Years of want
nourish the irony ripening
inside the cage that ribs
slowly knit; the heart an apple
condensing on the tree of blood—
his mother, his father dead;
one brother drowned,
the rest—wind-blown seeds.
Silently he laughs.
Deep eyes follow each twist
of ivy snaking over white
tenement walls into light
and warmth. He has read
nothing stills the heart.

It is almost noon.
Around him twenty bodies singly
stir in thirteen beds,
latecomers to the lightened
silence of waking thoughts.
Above his head a little girl
mumbles TV jingles
while she cleans her teeth.
An old man, windows dark
with thirty years nicotine,
shambles out his door,

a week's garbage cradled
in his arm.

That your cat?

He has asked a thousand times.
Deaf, he needs no answer.

Watching two men laugh
through an ivy-draped window
I start to dress.
Someone I love links
hands round my waist.
We laugh. The day is ours.
The old man creaks back
through his door. The other
crouches among the strays,
two milk-bowls almost empty.
One hand rests gently
on a whiskered, contented head.
The day too is theirs.