

Passing the Sacrament at Eastgate Nursing Home

Every third Sunday we gave them
bread of another world.
Usually it was George and I.
We'd pull up in my dad's Monte Carlo,
brisk as bishops, solemn as high counselors.
We filled cups in the janitor's closet,
looking only once at the wrinkled
Miss July behind the door.

When it came time, we broke and passed,
sliding between wheelchairs and walkers
with the grace of nurses, never smiling,
decorous in our sneakers and clip-on ties.
Of course, we had our moments.
There was the guy who stood on his chair
and yelled for a bingo card, and the lady
who started rubbing my leg and calling me Jesus.
But we kept composure—talked them back
into the quiet of their lunacy,
unknotted their fingers from our arms.

We always took the slow road home.
If it was summer, we'd drive by the pool,
scouting the matched perfection,
the bikini splendor, of the Hunzaker twins.
And when we had money, we'd head for Winchell's.
Sometimes on the last mile home,
with the windows down
and a smile of sunlight on the road,
I'd think of Eastgate,
how I carried trays to bedridden members—
the lady in room 243,
who wore her breasts at her waist.
Craning forward, she opened her mouth,
and I with clean and careful hands
laid the bread on her tongue.

—Lance E. Larsen