

# Now I Pray

By Kathy Engel

POETRY OUT LOUD 

Ashen face, wool hat bobbing,  
the young boy's eyes dart to me,  
then up at the man pulling a rolling  
suitcase, whose hand he holds,  
then back at me. His legs move  
as if without gravity. The man asks:  
Do you know a church on this street  
that serves free food? I want to say  
I know. That the names of churches  
on an Avenue called Americas roll  
out of me. I want to tell you  
it is temporary, their condition:  
suitcase, darting eyes, seeking free  
food at 9 pm in a big city on a school night.  
I want to tell you I don't for a moment  
wonder if that is really the boy's father  
or uncle or legitimate caretaker —  
something in the handholding and  
eyes, having watched too many  
episodes of *Law and Order*. I want  
to tell you I take them to a restaurant  
and pay for a warm meal or empty  
my wallet not worrying how  
offensive that might be because  
in the end hunger is hunger.  
I want to tell you I call someone  
who loves them — that there is someone —  
and say your guys are lost, can  
you come? I want to tell you I sit  
down on the sidewalk at the corner  
of Waverly and pray — that all  
passing by, anonymous shoes  
marking the pavement, join  
in a chorus of prayer humming  
like cicadas in the Delta. I want to  
tell you the boy and the man eat food  
encircled by the warmth of bodies.  
I want to turn the cold night into a feast.  
I will tell you I am praying.

