

Now I Pray

By Kathy Engel

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.

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