

T H E • W I D O W

Her town waits for one good storm
to end the year, to bring
quiet whiteness which softens
sadness of bare trees,
rests ever-giving earth,

but only scraps of white from
half-hearted, half-forgotten snow
litter fields and yards
like remnants of time torn into
confusion of frozen memories.

She looks small,
standing at her carved door,
Victorian house heavy above her.
She tilts slightly caneward,
eyes and mouth smile,
neck mottled with freckles of age.

We step over cracks in her walk
where she plants flowers each spring.
Now they are weeds, awkward, angled,
with brown dry heads
begging for snow
to cover their ugliness.

She has just returned from a funeral,
another old friend viewed,
remembered as growing vine,
torn down from arbor, now
a woody shell, brittle in the coffin.

She apologizes for her cold house,
broken furnace.
Brown wallpaper closes in
dark hall lined with shut doors.
Ink-shiny plants flourish along walls.

In her sitting-room, padded rocking chair,
lumpy in faded comforter,
looks out the window at frog-shaped
tree stump she painted green.
Her cat waits on back railing
for "his good hot meal
I fix morning and night."

We arrange our chairs for talking.
She asks our names, repeats them.
We admire her plants, staked, washed,
standing for inspection
like well cared-for children.

We look through museum glass doors
at the parlor's velvet antiques,
smooth cushions, unscuffed carpet.
Again she tells us, "this plant hasn't
flowered since he died. Such pretty
pink flowers. Not since he died,
three years ago."

As we leave, hall doors
like history books plead
to be opened.
Shiny leaves brush our arms.

We pass the furnace man at the door,
step over the old flowers
dying in the cracks
and see the cold December sun
on the waiting edge of clouds.

Julia Barrett



JULIA BARRETT is mother of six and grandmother of seven. She has run in nine marathons and is currently preparing for the St. George Marathon. Many of her ideas come when running.