

Margaret By Night

By Betsy Warland

Reading *The Stone Angel* in the night, my parents overhead. Their muffled conversations. Their tensions. Glints of sixty some years of loving. Knowing. Hagar's rage illicit in this air conditioned world. Passion a sunset away. I have waited over a decade to read this book. For the right time. Why now, I don't know. But I am. And it makes me nervous. Elated. My father's hair. Attentiveness gone. Dandruff on his storm-blue shoulder, suit askew. Too big. Yet again. At the airport he sits. Cries. Has ever since his stroke. Half his body numb. Wooden. Relearning life from his left side. The feminine now allowable. Often overwhelming him. Leaving, I kiss him. His body shakes with soundless crying. Each time it's this way. I leave. We wonder. All three. Is *this* the

last time? So many rehearsals. Tears replacing former silence. Words still too. My hand waves through the small window. This gesture an erasure? Stroking? The back and forth of I don't know? His last image of me. Crop-harvesting patterns comforting from above. We disappear into our separate elements. Hagar dies by the time I'm home. Three months later my father lies down on Christmas Eve and does the same. "He looked so happy." My mother stunned. Abandoned at the end of his bed. And you Margaret, a month later. I wrote you before you died. To thank you. A small letter. A hand in the window. I didn't tell you I wondered about Hagar's last words. It seemed perhaps a facile way to end a book. Unlike what came before. Every word needing to

be there. Now I think differently of it. Whispered storied in the dark. Children tell one another (when we're supposed to be asleep). Stories out of the nights of our minds. Hagar fierce to the end. "Oh, for mercy's sake let me hold it myself!" Glass of water. Straight back chair. My grandmother insisting we help her up from her death bed into it. No convincing her of anything but. Once seated she knew, "put me back in bed" and died. The story ends somewhere. Or goes beyond what we imagine *gno, narrate*. Relentless pursuit of narrative. And when we stop, what then? Our minds the true texts that books only gesture at. Hagar's last words a narrator's sustaining breath: "And then —" Two word bridge to a different dark. My father's smile.

An Evening of Poetry

A Story by Marvyne Jenoff

If someone doesn't fight me I'll have to wear this armor
All of my life.
— Jack Spicer, *The Holy Grail*

Dear Dad,

I have no idea where in the world you are. Even if you are dead I have no idea which direction you would have taken. But I'm writing this anyway because I'm confused and I have no one else to talk to.

I feel that it's finally all right to approach you, now that you can be proud of me. I remember the time I came to you with a problem. You laughed in my face and said, "Daughter, I'm three times your age with half your education and I have the same problem." Dad, that was all the lesson I ever needed. I advised you on the spot, with alternatives, and let me tell you

that's the last time anyone ever laughed at me. And, Dad, I'm warning you right now that this letter concerns poetry. As I'd say to anyone who cast aspersions on the seriousness of such a pursuit, the fact that I do it gives it credibility.

I should begin with news from home. Unemployment is down and Mom is dead. You'll enjoy hearing about my career. I don't suppose you know that when I was seventeen Mom asked me whether I wanted to be a nurse or a teacher. I decided I'd rather deal with people who could stand up and account for themselves. At eighteen I was teaching in my own classroom. At the same time I studied literature: after all, literature was life, and surely it behooved a teacher to know everything she could. After my fifth academic degree I began to realize that in

order to teach you had to be able to do, as well. That's how I became a poet. And I think you'll be proud of what I'm going to tell you.

Most people don't understand what a lot of work poetry is, but I've done what I had to do and I've been rather successful. I've published a little, and not long ago a librarian in a town I'd never heard of phoned to invite me to give a poetry reading. I guess it won't be long before my name — our name — is a household word! She had invited another poet to read with me, and he had agreed to pick me up at 5:15 in the afternoon. But the letter of confirmation from the library stated that he would pick me up at 5:00. Now, my time is valuable. I phoned the other poet himself to set the matter straight.

He seemed surprised at my call, but