

**Chris Waters**

**Elegy for Fred Howard**

1.

Here: you don't camouflage bottles  
in the bin; you leg's in a cast.  
They get your mail; you're out of  
town,  
they tend plants, bring in  
newspapers.  
Are they too-on-the-go too?

2.

Tedious Paris; a rental  
one half-block from Three-Coins  
Fountain;  
St. Petersburg and Moscow one half  
the trip each; lively-arts series  
coming out of our ears (going  
in?);  
same club, different activities;  
retirement, avocation dropped  
at long last for vocation; no  
time, vocation is vacation.

3.

Saint Will, who's a FISH driver,  
sold  
us our house, whose hearth  
smoldered,  
who spent days with apologies  
after the hullabaloo, rendering  
it proof against repetitions.  
Not to speak of his wife, Clarice,  
visitor of the sick, or their son  
Ted,  
housebuilder for the poor. Tips of  
icebergs: Shirley and others do  
likewise. Just one more, if you  
please:  
Ma, in New York, vicar's daughter,  
getting me, when people smoked,  
to bring cartons back from the  
South  
to hand out single cigarettes  
in the wards. (Will's dad was one  
too!)  
Another? Down there, Cousin Bea's  
life was the Church. Never, I'm  
sure,

did she use the word. (I once  
did.)  
"Y'all butter up two while they're  
hot!"

4.  
Patience is a virtue,  
virtue is a grace. Put the two  
together  
and you'll have the price of eggs.

5.  
"Ah know the Nigra, Boy. Ah grew  
up with 'um." My interest's  
elsewhere,  
about caring what you say,  
skirting hurt unless it's needed-  
rare, rare. Gentility once was  
out there. The very word now  
sounds  
corny. Brutal frankness. "Give me  
X," says the phoner or terrorist.  
"Dollars, pounds, what's your  
worth?"  
says the stare. Southern gentility  
down the drain, their lawyers-  
bankers,  
being from there, pretend it's  
theirs.  
Worse up North? The appraising  
look  
crosses the line, follows you like  
the moon. Church socials,  
nineteenth holes,  
weekend regattas, post office.  
Gentility, gentility,  
wherefore aren't thou, gentility?

6.  
As is my wont (milestone coming!),  
yesterday, skimming the obits,  
"Howard" as last name caught my  
eye.  
"Fred" crossed my mind, sent it to  
Ma, Bea, Shirley, Will, Clarice~-  
all  
those lovely people. OK, I'll  
stop.  
None of them, at a cocktail party,  
would have your worth in mind,  
even  
over wine. They'd be wondering

if they could help somehow.  
Grievous  
moment: happening to glance back,  
the so much thinner face was  
Fred's.

7.  
" . . . *following a long illness.*"  
How  
was this? Stars careening though  
life,  
he and BA, talking to them  
was talking to myself, no games  
played. I was he, she, vice versa,  
their sons my good friends though  
strangers.  
Tennis with Fred and BA was  
as if I did well and they were so-  
so,  
although they were the best  
around.

8.  
Why hadn't our stars passed  
closer?  
My Paris, Rome, Hatteras times.  
Who will strengthen the elegy?  
Deeds must have followed deeds.  
Good Conrad, holder of our pulse?  
BA? For now, keep the cat in the  
bag,  
and she's part of the  
wondrousness.  
Alas, Fred, I wish I'd known you.  
Well, others did, and that's  
enough.  
BA's carrying on the good work.  
Gentility, gentility.  
Our memory of Ethel the Cat  
is Ethel on the porch with  
raccoons.  
The day when, for a tennis match,  
Fred and BA stepped onto the dock  
from a seaplane.

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Chris Waters has published three  
chapbooks (from March Street  
Press); *Ghost Lighthouse: New and  
Selected Hatteras Poems* appeared  
in 2010. His fiction and poetry

have been nominated for Pushcart  
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