



Vincent Barry

After Early Morning Class

Caught sobbing. Cracking up at three in the morning. Blurting out everything, before early morning class....

A lifetime ago. A girl has come back, like Fitzgerald's forgotten package at three AM, like a death sentence.

Can't stop thinking about her, I go on and on....

Terrible things for a wife to hear, before early morning class.

"I want to go back!" I cry. "Go back?" "Like Emily!" "Emily?" "Yes," feebly, "because I know better."

"Ah!," she goes, "*that* Emily," because she knows *Our Town*, because we know Wilder, because we teach American Lit, y'see, early in the morning.

Then from me more crazy talk—about how I can do better, about wanting to go back to a future stretching out before me like Willa’s unplowed prairie—something entire, complete, great.... Back to after-Mass Sunday afternoons...back to family dinner...to locked hands under interlarding table talk.... back to parents knowing but not minding because they know how we feel....

They did, didn’t they? Didn’t we? Emily and me?...

Jesus, what if —Jesus!...

My wife stands there, with an attentive poise of her head and a deep-veined hand bracing against whatever’s available—a wall, a table, a sink—as I strut about, hair upright in panic fear, soliloquizing about what I would do *now*. About what I’d say now:

“‘I have something to say,’ I’d say,” I say. “‘And I’m going to say it, because if I don’t I’m gonna bust!’”

“‘We wouldn’t want that now, would we?’” someone laughs.

“Then boldly I’d jump out of my chair,” I proclaim, then further, proudly, what I’d do, as she gently takes my hand and whispers, “Cuffed to the long unvisited past,” and I go on, “‘I just want you all to know what you all mean to me. How grateful I am to you for—’” “‘And you wouldn’t care,’” she breaks in, leading on, “‘because that’s the way you feel and, by God, it’s about time you said it!’”

“Yes! Yes! ‘And most of all,’ I’d say,” I say, “‘Most of all, I love you, and want to marry you and grow old and die with you.’” And she’s thinking, I just know she is, “‘Who’s ‘you’?’” “‘Who’s to say who’s ‘you’?’” is all I can think to say before I say, “‘I couldn’t say...’”

We agree, over coffee, a short black for her, a double for me, that they were wondrous words to say while cracking up at three in the morning, before making love, before someone sighed, “So F. Scott...so Theophilus North...so-so Saroyanesque...” Coulda been her, or me, or both...but wondrous words to say before early morning class, we agree, after early morning class.

After retiring from a career teaching philosophy, Vincent Barry returned to his first love, fiction. His stories have appeared in numerous publications in the U.S. and abroad, including: *The Saint Ann’s Review*, *The Bitchin’ Kitsch*, *The Broken City*, *Abstract: Contemporary Expressions*. *Kairos*, *Caveat Lector*, *Terror House*, *The Fem*, *BlogNostics*, *The Writing Disorder*, *whimperbang*, *The Disappointed Housewife*, *The Collidescope*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Beakful*, *Bombfire*, *Fleas on the Dog*, *Potato Soup Journal*, and *Pigeon Review*. Barry lives in Santa Barbara, California.