

Leavetaking

JANET PROULX

As I leave the nursing home where my mother now lives
I run a gantlet of women – wives, lovers, sisters, friends
faded beauties trapped by fragile bodies and failing minds,
payoff for simply growing old.

Tethered to wheelchairs, tubes, and oxygen tanks
they clutch battered teddy bears or baby dolls
and call me mother or nurse or names not my own
hold out a trembling hand and beg me to take them home.

I hurry past, anxious to escape their neediness or perhaps my own fears
when a voice calls out, so sweet and clear
“Are you going home, now? God bless you my dear.”
And I bless her in return, unworthy though I am to say the words.

In the foyer, two ladies sit regally in vinyl winged chairs
and delay my passage by inquiring about the time or the weather,
homely conversation that invariably turns to recollections
of people and places held most dear.

I linger and listen, mindful of the door behind me,
what it represents.