**The White Hydrangeas**

LARRY O'BRIEN

You notice them first while getting the mail, in the airless heat of an August noon, blooming from the parched yard of a neighbor.

Their name means *vessels of water*, but today, they seem more like sailing vessels their tiny spinnakers billowing, tacking away from the currents of summer. You see them flourish in Middle Farms Cemetery, blossoming gaily over the headstones, when you drive to Kosinski's farm stand for the last of the bright, native tomatoes. And, on Clifton Road in Rhode Island, you inhale the sweet foam of their branches, as you walk to the beach for a final swim. Their scent is an old fashioned perfume, their shape ornate and Victorian, like a seaside hotel of the gilded age, closing its doors for the season. Even now these aging ladies are waving their lacy hankies goodbye from the rail of a White Star liner its prow knifing fast toward icy waters.