

KAREN MCELREA

Wishes in the Almost True

I've gone clean without you: I
drink only sparkling water and
eat leafy or sprouting matter;
I wear a sober look, and sturdy
white underwear without the lace
and strategic rips that dared you
to try a new approach; I am sewn
up tight and receive no takers;
washed of memories, I easily
decline cheap replacements.
Still, life's gifts hold constant
and I am seldom left wanting.

I travel only to Scandinavian
countries, with less risk of
contamination from exotica,
and I pass through galleries
now without comment. Yet
each day offers renewed joy:
sunrise over an icefield, seen
through an unopened bottle;
a hungry touch withheld from
the stranger briefly longed for.
It passes; it always passes—
I meet misery but so rarely.

I visit the plainest churches
and slide unpronounceable
coins into snowy envelopes
and thank this foreign God
for the gift of being healed
of the need to be held for
safekeeping, of clutching
at a moment's wholeness.
I give silent thanks also for
the opportunity to slip away
before I am asked to commit:
I repent I forgive I believe.

I wake on pale clean sheets
and pack less than I brought,
diminished by each journey,
returning from a morning flight
full of the innocent faces of
strangers to find my shuttered
house undisturbed by the trade
of half-hearted recriminations.
And as I stand in my kitchen
with the kettle screaming into
a sunbeam, I am not unhappy.
I hope this finds you the same.