Oranges

Timmy said someone told Judy if she

peeled an orange in one unbroken swath

and stood it whole and empty,

like the bandages the Invisible Man put on to prove he's there,

it meant she'd be a nun. Judy was the girl with brushfire hair

and freckles who one day made my heart stop—Rob Polk and I

were walking and laughing when she came the other way

and the world blinked gone. My right side came to

slower than the rest of me—I woke up

buckled at the knees still laughing the same laugh—

as if the video had skipped one second forward—

though Rob Polk swore it didn't, that I went right on

laughing from the void. Timmy wondered if we

might become nuns too, perhaps in Judy's convent—

each day at lunch we practiced till our shucked skins

in the fruit bowl passed for fruit. Give me this day

my daily orange and I'll still peel it like that;

more out of fondness now than affectation.

Soliciting no closer union with Judy or with God

but what it's brought me: this redolence of memory;

and a succulence of lust

for the fierce, sweet grace-made-flesh of oranges.

First published in "Alimentum," and reprinted in "For the Table." It's knit together out of true memory and fiction. I do peel oranges in this fashion; it may well have begun because I was told that nun story (I did hear that story, but I don't recall when); I did see a girl I was obsessing over walk toward me and have this experience; the friends here are based on real people, but I did not share these experiences with them. Etc. Again, it's partly a credo piece.