

*Preparing for  
My Mother's Death*

*Richard McCann*

I practice going through effects:  
shoeboxes of letters, sealed paperweights,  
stockings, a ballerina inside a pink clock.  
This task falls to me, the one who learned like you  
to clear the table of cups  
where someone sat.

The family leaves addresses for emergencies.  
Never to know the fact of someone's death:  
In a supermarket I hear your cough  
and it prepares me;

on a train I meet a woman,  
purse on her knees, nervous  
for her children,  
it prepares me.  
I see a stranger  
in your doorway,  
it prepares me.  
I watch you in your yard  
clip back the Rose of Sharon,  
it prepares me.

This job I've made myself, the practice  
of burial --  
You took all the other parts  
when I rehearsed at twelve for the school play.  
I see you clear your mother's room,  
find the rough drafts of the letter never mailed  
to tell you she was dying.

I, like you, want things in place.  
You wanted no one to upset  
the arrangement of china birds on glass tables.  
I thought you chose things because they were  
breakable.  
Boxes you wrapped said "Fragile."

Now I practice your death  
wrapping the cut glass, the Limoges,  
everything in paper,  
taking such care.

