

Eight Poems · *Jack Gilbert*

WHY GET SO EXCITED

Are the angels of her bed the angels
who come near me alone in mine?
Are the trees so green in her head
maybe the purples I find on plums?
When she says like steel and fire
I think secretly and with tenderness
of wet mouths. And when she tries
to tell of it, saying shoe and pillow
and river meaning melting lords
of death, avalanches of crows and long,
long moments of passing through,
do I say yes, yes, shoes and rivers?

IN UMBRIA

Once upon a time I was sitting outside the cafe
watching twilight in Umbria when a girl came
from the bakery with the bread her mother wanted
and did not know what to do. Already bewildered
by being thirteen and just that summer a woman.
Now had to walk right by the American man.
But she did great. Went past and around the corner
with style, not noticing me. Almost perfect.
At the last second could not resist darting a look
down at her new breasts. Often I go back
to that dip of her head when people talk to me
about this one or that one of the great beauties.