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.

