

FROM THE BOX MARKED  
*SOME ARE MISSING*



*Charles W. Pratt*

*The Hobbleshush Granite State Poetry Series, Volume I*

HOBBLEBUSH BOOKS  
Brookline, New Hampshire

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◇◇◇ From *In the Orchard* (1986) ◇◇◇

## INTO PLACE

It's not so much a departure as an arrival,  
Or rather, a having arrived—as when, out driving,  
You pass an orchard on a southward hill,  
Old apple trees aslant in heaps of prunings.  
*For Sale.* What do you know of apples? Still,  
One morning you wake up under a different ceiling

And feeling that you've not chosen but been chosen,  
Are something less than owner, more than guest.  
You fertilize and mow, attend the slow  
Growth of apples readying for harvest,  
And settle into place like leaves or snow,  
Unfold like a letter delivered as addressed.

## THE VERANDAH

From a neighbor's house, my daughter's laughter carries  
Over the darkening water, and the deeper  
Tones of the boy I tell her she'll someday marry,  
Though she tells me she's known him forever,  
No chance of romance, while solitary  
On the verandah I watch the Necco-wafer-  
Pink sun sink (oh, sentimental hour)  
And from boat to boat the wrinkled water hurry  
Whispering *Temporary, temporary*.



Full moon high tide, the harbor brimful, quivering.  
The evening quickens with the passionate cries  
Of children, *Come on, come on*, and *Coming, coming*,  
To kick the can or catching fireflies  
Or lighting firecrackers on a string  
To throw them from a float and get a rise  
From pogies and dark watchers-from-verandahs,  
Who bark a few clichés about the young  
And then subside, ashamed, remembering.



My mother had a sort of swinging divan  
On which she glided through decades of summers  
On the verandah, out of the mad-dog sun.  
From it one day she watched her youngest plummet  
Down from the sky like an angel heaved from heaven  
Or sun-singed Icarus plunging from his summit.  
Silent I fell—into a fortunate privet.  
Silent she glided. The roof I knew forbidden,  
And I knew myself neither condemned nor forgiven.



No running on the pier or horseplay on the float;  
An hour after meals before you swim;  
Bait your own hook; no standing up in rowboats;  
Never half-hitch the main sheet on the wind;  
Voices carry over water, so don't shout.  
Such were the laws, sensible and simple,  
And from verandahs on the harbor's rim  
Binoculars kept every child in sight  
And registered what we did wrong or right.



All day on the verandah my mother swayed  
Like a sailboat from its mooring swaying,  
Watching the sunlit stage on which we played  
(Darkness lurking always in the wings,  
For shimmering surfaces and friends betray)  
And finding cause for praise in everything  
But outboards, barking dogs, and children whining.  
So with the easy tether of her gaze  
She moored us in the casual drift of days.



Sunset verandahs? Cocktails and philandering?  
Not on this one, since I can remember.  
Pandering, yes; verandah-sitters scanned  
The stars and brought my wife and me together  
One Sunday afternoon on the verandah.  
A nice girl, a nice boy, and nearly neighbors,  
You might have thought that we'd been friends forever  
As we drank iced tea and shared a tuna sandwich  
And began to ponder what our fates had planned.





Night and day on the verandah, Love,  
We hear the foghorn sounding from the Bay:  
A mourning dove, you say, a warning dove,  
Dark undertone to our complacent days.  
What does it mourn, what does it warn us of,  
Alone there in the middle of the waves,  
Unmoving center of their mirrored maze,  
Until our thoughts and dreams seem woven of  
That sound as lonely as the loss of love.



A summer house: a house of many rooms  
Where the dead, the living and the still unborn  
Mingle like jigsaw-puzzle pieces from  
The box marked *Some are missing* that entertained  
Our family through the annual three-day storm.  
They brush against each other at each turning,  
Presences familiar and unknown,  
And on the verandah now a shadowy form  
Seining for ghosts with his loose nets of rhyme.

## RESOLUTION

When the tsunami draws back its fistful of waters  
And crushes the city, let me for once be ready.  
Let me be washing the dishes or patting the dog.

When the great windstorm angles across the flatlands  
Hungry and howling, let me be patting the dog.  
Let me be kneading the bread or picking an apple.

When the ground shudders and splits and all walls fall,  
Let me be writing a letter or kneading the bread.  
Let me be holding my lover, watching the sunrise.

When the suicide bomber squeezes the trigger  
And fierce the flames spurt and wild the body parts fly,  
Let me be holding my lover or drinking my coffee.

Let us be drinking our coffee, unprepared.