

*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.

