

SUICIDE WATCH I

**ANDREW
MCFADYEN-
KETCHUM**

i.

I kicked at pebbles on the shoulder of the highway,
tested the wind's direction with a finger. The winds
that came spoke of hoarfrost and fields, commerce
rumbling by on I-40, the streetlamps burning
their fishhook of light before the red-brick Victorian—
its locked double doors, its hundred shuttered eyes.
Not a family member, not a lover, no guests welcome
past visiting hours, I watched the night watchman doze
in his A-frame of spit cups and *Hustlers*, I observed
the roosting of birds, the library of stars adrift against
the trees that lined the county road where I drafted
my path over the high outer wall and through the just-
mown grass, the method by which I'd scale the sanitarium,
tap a finger on her window, whisper, *Mary, let me in.*

ii.

I still don't know why I've put her in this house
for the somewhat-less-than-sane where they kept her
a mere 24 hours, a two-hour's drive from her bedroom
where she hid herself the year before she died.

That December home from college, I'd park
across the street from her house, warm my hands
by the heat of my Sentra's 4-cylinders and wait to catch
a glimpse of Mary in her window. More than a decade
I've been writing these verses. Still I have no answer.
She spent just a year in college. She climbed
the mountains of Nepal, helped raise schools for the poor.
In the one picture I've kept, she smiles at the camera.
Sometimes a fly lands on the glass of the frame.
Sometimes it looks as if she's blinking.

iii.

And what would you do differently? she asks, sights trained
through the passenger window on that glowing square
of light that could be the window of the imagined sanitarium,
could be the window of her bedroom on Willis Ave. She's
blue-eyed here. The breeze is honeysuckle and sex. And even
though she knows I've no answers, knows when I say nothing
I say everything, she places a finger to my lips to freeze me
in that game of *What Ifs* I've been playing since college
then departs to follow that brick path back to herself
from the mailbox to the stoop, up the sanitarium walls
and through her house's archway into that white
hospital room while I'm stuck here, eyeing that figure
lighting the window. Is that a chest x-ray or the moon?
Is that the girl I once loved, the girl we thought we knew?