

Alec Soth's Archived Blog

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Friday Poem

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The Correspondence-School Instructor Says Goodbye to His Poetry Students

by Galway Kinnell

Goodbye, lady in Bangor, who sent me
snapshots of yourself, after definitely hinting
you were beautiful; goodbye,
Miami Beach urologist, who enclosed plain
brown envelopes for the return of your very
"Clinical Sonnets"; goodbye, manufacturer
of brassieres on the Coast, whose eclogues
give the fullest treatment in literature yet
to the sagging breast motif; goodbye, you in San Quentin,
who wrote, "Being German my hero is Hitler,"
instead of "Sincerely yours," at the end of long,
neat-scripted letters extolling the Pre-Raphaelites:

I swear to you, it was just my way
of cheering myself up, as I licked
the stamped, self-addressed envelopes,
the game I had of trying to guess
which one of you, this time,
had poisoned his glue. I did care.
I did read each poem entire.
I did say everything I thought
in the mildest words I knew. And now,
in this poem, or chopped prose, no better,
I realize, than those troubled lines
I kept sending back to you,
I have to say I am relieved it is over:
at the end I could feel only pity
for that urge toward more life

your poems kept smothering in words, the smell
of which, days later, tingled in your nostrils
as new, God-given impulses
to write.

Goodbye,
you who are, for me, the postmarks again
of imaginary towns—Xenia, Burnt Cabins, Hornell—
their solitude given away in poems, only their loneliness kept.