

Intercession

by [Jean Janzen](#) in the [April 5, 2005](#) issue

Winter dawn pinks even this dirty air,
here where the currents of the world
stall between mountain ranges.
We awaken inhaling fumes and dust,
the calls of crows, breath and prayers
from around the globe.

A child in church, I knelt with
the congregation, leaned into the wails
of women around me pleading for the son
lost to Chicago, for Hiroshimo's victims,
the girl with the iron lung. They would
begin on a pitch around middle C
and slowly rise with arched phrases
into a high tremolo toward the amen,
as though reaching to heaven.

Now the sun tears
the gray veil, and doves repeat
their soft, low moaning, for heaven
is nearer than we think—in the undersides
of leaves and in their shine,
warmth on my shoulder, scent of bread.
Even in that sick, black night when a man
stood in the center of the lane, his arms
out, pleading for the headlights to come in,
as we stood beside him, now in a silent
heap, his boots flung off, as we
breathed "mercy," as we breathed "help."