

Laying on of hands

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Only with dogs and children
and sometimes a woman weeping
on a bus station bench, hands
folded across her face like a veil.

The stranger passing
can only bring himself to stand
beside her, allow his hand
to settle on her shoulder, fingertips
touching, then lifting, then lighting
poised, muscles taut
for flight at the first ripple.

Only in a public place:
soldiers too sober to notice
a plain woman on a bench.
Widows on pensions, touring America,
passes clutched deep in pants' pockets.
College kids lost in travel diaries.

Only the janitor, himself invisible as khaki,
sees as he kneels beside the bench
to save his back retrieving
the paper coffee cup—its handles
the halves of a valentine,
unfolding wings,

a woman rising
in a man's overcoat, wiping her eyes
with a wadded hankie and laughing
at nothing . . . nothing at all.