

Evening with long books

by [Jeff Gundy](#) in the [February 19, 2014](#) issue

*Each man is a half-open door  
leading to a room for everyone.*

—Tomas Tranströmer

My friends say Tolstoy really got into the heads of his female characters. They give him credit. They talk dreamily of the books they love, books so long only two will make a whole course. This seems to me like making twelve gallons of chili and eating nothing else till it's gone, but I smile and listen. My friends are smarter than me and more patient, surely. I'm the only guy in the house tonight so I get my own room with a good foam mattress, a bad desk, windows that open on other rooms. I make up the bed and lie down with Tranströmer's poems, ten or twenty lines on a page, fewer words in fifty years than Tolstoy or George Eliot put down in a decent work week. *Every man is a half-open door.*

The door to my room is cracked open, lights blaze outside. My friends are all upstairs. If I don't shut the light off, no one will. The wind will settle toward morning, the waves begin again to spell their single complicated word. Waiting for the ferry we watched a hawk try to lift a four-foot snake from the shallows, drop it, circle, swoop and grab again and lose its grip and veer away. Oh, how sweet would that meat have been, how grand a feast, how we would have cracked and sucked the bones, how long we could have made that story last.