

JACLYN SHELTRY [LETTER FOR YOUR LEAVING]  
FIRST PLACE WALLACE STEVENS POETRY PRIZE

*Drogi Papa,*  
will you please come back?  
The tomatoes in your garden  
are marked with black spots now  
and the yellowed stems sag  
from the abandoned weight.  
You would not remind me to pick them  
When they were red.

I know you don't want to hear this.

(I see you slap your knee with that  
callused hand,  
mumble—  
*chodź tu—*  
but I do not understand).

Papa,  
please come home—  
it's been so long since I've tasted  
your creamed *ogórek*,  
and the sound you made when we  
complained of its saltiness  
has faded.

Papa,  
please forgive me  
for crying—  
I know you won't approve.  
But I had to write this letter,  
because all I can remember of your face—  
folded by the years—  
is your nose,  
how thin it had become...

That's all;  
I know you will tell me to stop this  
nonsense,  
and eat—  
*jedz!*

Now I must find how to send this to you;  
I don't know where to begin.

*Zawsze kochająca,*  
Jaclyn