

## To J.W. from Reno

Joanne Mallari

Already I am waiting for autumn  
and its small glimpses of resurrection:  
At Idlewild, the leaves will change  
color like scales. Did I tell you  
about my sister who came before?  
She spent a mere three days on earth  
(it was October, the year of the dragon),  
and my parents called a priest to perform  
the last rites. I don't believe in purgatory,  
but it sounds preferable to heaven.  
Imagine sitting on a cloud for the rest  
of eternity, sounding a trumpet you never  
learned to play. When our fathers  
talk about heaven, they say they'll reap  
the rewards for their suffering  
(the women they put up with, the work  
they endured). The more they look up,  
they forget to look down. When our mothers  
talk about heaven, they describe a spring day.  
At seven, I imagined the rolling hills  
and Mama Mary welcoming us with open  
arms like a scene from *The Sound of Music*.  
Now, I wonder if our parents' heaven  
would be my hell—the stagnant, perpetual  
grace of it all. What if heaven is not a fixed  
destination but a pendulum between one season  
and the next? See the leaves waiting to fall  
so they can shroud the ground. In Reno,  
days swing between the heat of summer  
and a glimpse of winter. Let heaven be  
a mile marker rather than a finish line.  
Let heaven be a chrysalis rather than  
a butterfly. Let resurrection  
happen like the fall.



Photo by: Joanne Mallari