

Strawberry Festival

by Eric H. Edwards

I stand on the sidewalk I haven't walked for twenty five years
because I want to look at the lawn of Saint Barnabas

where the Strawberry Festival has been held even before
I became a Cape Codder, breathing salt and walking sand.

Once I got a car everything changed, and still
my life is too fast to tell this. Big slow trees, that's the story

even today, and all the families and their children
who wandered underneath that green canopy

eating strawberries. As one old salt said it to me,
as if I would never be old enough to know what he meant,

“put them with rhubarb, there's no better.”
The church itself is still as heavy and dark

as a cloud over Golgotha,
but the lawn is strangely lovely and inviting.

Just the place for strawberries, a little off
the center of the neighborhood, a little set back,

not on the Village Green, where the Nurses Fete
lived a hotter but shorter lifetime of childhood.

I have to turn around to see the Green, although
if I were at the Festival I could eat strawberries

and look at the Green across a street of almost fifty years
where Zada drew Falmouth's children in pastel

and I first saw the frightening punch in Punch.
Cows once pastured on the Green I guess,

as I eat whipped cream and some of the biscuit,
but the cows do not eat the grass of Saint Barnabas.

And I can see further across the other boundary street
to the Congregational church that sits right on the sidewalk

as white and hollow as the bone of an angel.
A strawberry over there would be like blood.

I can see through thirty five years to the bottom
of that dry church, the coffeehouse where I met my wife.

I take some strawberry juice up in my spoon.
There is a little cloud of cream in it.

I see the tip of the Green where the roads meet
and the water fountain ran all summer.

I especially remember the first disappointing year
they ran out of strawberries before noon.

Punch got his teeth pulled, cars got faster,
elms began to die, and I grew faster, so fast

for a while I couldn't see these things anymore,
not even the beautiful strawberry

lying low on the hay, as low as a baby
that knows it is part of a blessing.