

ANGELA ALAIMO O'DONNELL

In the Valley of the Shadow

I.

As children well schooled in love and loss,
we gather in these last December days.
Her dying an abyss we have to cross,
yet none of us has found the proper way
to navigate the single plank of life
struck plain across the darkness far below,
its width as trim and narrow as a knife,
its length as long as sorrow and as slow.
We conjure the solstice and the sun
who runs his brief course across the sky.
The winter of our lives at last begun
as our mother has, at last, begun to die.
We honor conclusion, her final year.
We walk the brink of time, despite our fear.

II.

We walk the brink of time, despite our fear
and learn to love this living hour by hour,
the urge to cling together strong and clear
as Florida blue, the red hibiscus flower
that blooms against December's brilliant day
and teaches us that beauty does not cease,
that life regales us on our joyous way,
and, when we've reached the end, provides release.

The place we walk cannot be seen by eye
or told by heart or touched by eager hand.
It is as high and wide as summer sky,
its birds as bright and many as the sands.
There is a music there we cannot hear—
a song so long and sweet it charms the ear.