

Chris Waters

Elegy for Fred Howard

1.

Here: you don't camouflage bottles
in the bin; you leg's in a cast.
They get your mail; you're out of
town,
they tend plants, bring in
newspapers.
Are they too-on-the-go too?

2.

Tedious Paris; a rental
one half-block from Three-Coins
Fountain;
St. Petersburg and Moscow one half
the trip each; lively-arts series
coming out of our ears (going
in?);
same club, different activities;
retirement, avocation dropped
at long last for vocation; no
time, vocation is vacation.

3.

Saint Will, who's a FISH driver,
sold
us our house, whose hearth
smoldered,
who spent days with apologies
after the hullabaloo, rendering
it proof against repetitions.
Not to speak of his wife, Clarice,
visitor of the sick, or their son
Ted,
housebuilder for the poor. Tips of
icebergs: Shirley and others do
likewise. Just one more, if you
please:
Ma, in New York, vicar's daughter,
getting me, when people smoked,
to bring cartons back from the
South
to hand out single cigarettes
in the wards. (Will's dad was one
too!)
Another? Down there, Cousin Bea's
life was the Church. Never, I'm
sure,

did she use the word. (I once
did.)
"Y'all butter up two while they're
hot!"

4.
Patience is a virtue,
virtue is a grace. Put the two
together
and you'll have the price of eggs.

5.
"Ah know the Nigra, Boy. Ah grew
up with 'um." My interest's
elsewhere,
about caring what you say,
skirting hurt unless it's needed-
rare, rare. Gentility once was
out there. The very word now
sounds
corny. Brutal frankness. "Give me
X," says the phoner or terrorist.
"Dollars, pounds, what's your
worth?"
says the stare. Southern gentility
down the drain, their lawyers-
bankers,
being from there, pretend it's
theirs.
Worse up North? The appraising
look
crosses the line, follows you like
the moon. Church socials,
nineteenth holes,
weekend regattas, post office.
Gentility, gentility,
wherefore aren't thou, gentility?

6.
As is my wont (milestone coming!),
yesterday, skimming the obits,
"Howard" as last name caught my
eye.
"Fred" crossed my mind, sent it to
Ma, Bea, Shirley, Will, Clarice~-
all
those lovely people. OK, I'll
stop.
None of them, at a cocktail party,
would have your worth in mind,
even
over wine. They'd be wondering

if they could help somehow.
Grievous
moment: happening to glance back,
the so much thinner face was
Fred's.

7.
" . . . *following a long illness.*"
How
was this? Stars careening though
life,
he and BA, talking to them
was talking to myself, no games
played. I was he, she, vice versa,
their sons my good friends though
strangers.
Tennis with Fred and BA was
as if I did well and they were so-
so,
although they were the best
around.

8.
Why hadn't our stars passed
closer?
My Paris, Rome, Hatteras times.
Who will strengthen the elegy?
Deeds must have followed deeds.
Good Conrad, holder of our pulse?
BA? For now, keep the cat in the
bag,
and she's part of the
wondrousness.
Alas, Fred, I wish I'd known you.
Well, others did, and that's
enough.
BA's carrying on the good work.
Gentility, gentility.
Our memory of Ethel the Cat
is Ethel on the porch with
raccoons.
The day when, for a tennis match,
Fred and BA stepped onto the dock
from a seaplane.

Chris Waters has published three
chapbooks (from March Street
Press); *Ghost Lighthouse: New and
Selected Hatteras Poems* appeared
in 2010. His fiction and poetry

have been nominated for Pushcart
Prizes.