

Therese Halscheid

## EXCAVATING PRAYERS

I.

They will be taken out of old bottles and read.

II.

They will be pulled from colored glass that has been so long in the bright Florida sun. It will happen in the future, that they are discovered. It will be after my time and your time, yours, yours and yours, when these prayers are found — before the bottle chapel is seen by those who happen to wander into the wild swamp where it is well-hidden.

III.

There will be more than one pilgrimage. Many will enter this natural setting. Those who believe in the power of simple places. Outside the chapel, standing around, they will hear the good stories. They will learn the pure tales, what has been made known through kinfolk — of prayers written, of things that occurred afterward. Among the palmetto and wet ferns, those who know how to speak of this, will now speak of this. The sojourners will listen as all will be told to them. How it was. How it still is and will be.

IV.

They will be told to do nothing before they can enter. So they will stand waiting. In waiting, they will hear birds . . . as if for the first time.

V.

More will be revealed. They will learn of Joseph, the carpenter, and of his wife, Katherine. They will hear how it happened long ago. . . . That once upon a special time, Joseph drove an old truck to a local tavern each week, to haul away empties. That he spent hours after, cementing each bottle in place, laboring in hot sun, laying them on their sides,

angling them so light could enter. . . . They will see tools that he used. They will sense how he worked the place with his hands. The air will still hold all his thinking — what he spoke frequently, what he said faithfully in an unrehearsed way to heaven.

## VI.

There will be a pine door that someone will part open. Inside, will be a wooden podium, a tablet of paper, black pens. There will be a pew from the 1800's which Joseph got in the late 1900's all the way from Oklahoma. When the sojourners enter, many will ask, "*Well how does it happen here? How come the prayers work? How do you pray?*"

## VII.

As in the past, there will be God in the future.

## VIII.

In the future, they will be told of right prayers. That to make a right prayer, you need only to think first about it. Through thought, each one will feel what is the right thing to say.

## IX.

There will be God in the future, so thirsty, so thirsty. . . .

## X.

They will do it right. Everyone. But it will take time to overcome doubting. And they will write slow, to form the right messages. Struggling to mean what they say. . . . The wording will come alive then. After, they will feel the pulsing, the heartbeat of the paper. Some will ask, *How is it that what is right seems simple, that what is simple seems so hard to do?*

## XI.

Every right prayer will be rolled. They will make little scrolls. The necks of the bottles will swallow them.

## XII.

In the future, there will be God. God coming as a perfect spectacle, hands like rays of the bright Florida sun. God, who will touch the colored glass. And the prayers will glow all at once, all of them. The prayers will glow.

## XIII.

When the right prayers glow, things occur afterward. Again, there will be good stories. These will be passed down to kinfolk who will pass them down to kinfolk who will openly share them in years to come. In years to come, there will be sojourners who believe in the power of unusual places. And even those who do not believe. . . . They, too, will find the bottle chapel.

## XIV.

They will see God's bar. There will be God drinking.