

**AMONG STRANGERS I'VE KNOWN  
ALL MY LIFE**

**SANFORD FRASER**

**PARMI LES ETRANGERS QUE J'AI CONNUS  
TOUTE MA VIE**

**Traduction: Françoise Parouty**

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## Isabel Weeds

In Isabel's living room  
the mantel clock chimes at no one  
through its brass-rimmed face.  
The fat sofa cushions  
(wrapped in thick plastic)  
sit alone  
like the meat in a supermarket tray.

In the backyard, a summer night  
falls into long, collapsible chairs.  
Isabel leans on her crutches, hunting  
the weeds in her husband Harry's new-cut grass:  
"Here's a little rascal, dear," she says  
(holding the weed up for proof)  
"I found another one."

Harry murmurs, "Yes hon," from his hammock sling  
and dreams her young and fair  
a dead cigar in his smile—  
"Looks like rain," he adds.

At ten, the fireflies start to spark  
(even the moon begins to blush).  
Isabel frowns at Harry's lit cigar  
and swings on wooden wings around the house  
to dust the plants and scold the dog.

## Neighbor

I always speak first.  
Sometimes you answer

as though being forced by me  
to let a word, a tiny hello

drop from your mouth  
to the sidewalk.

Today you seem invincible  
you have reinforcements:

you're laughing with friends  
on the stoop next door

and standing in the crutches  
you sometimes wear.

I put on my friendly smile  
raise my hand to wave.

You look at me  
then quickly turn away.

I stumble home  
someone else.

## Ode to a Waitress

What do you want?  
she casually asked the air  
above my head

You.  
I want you  
I said to myself.

A corn muffin and coffee  
please.

The muffin toasted?  
No, just plain  
and cold.