daughter. Now act it. Going away isn’t going to change you. You tell Mr. Southerland that. Tell him you’ll be the same girl, only you won’t have a home. You’re going to act like a daughter, not like a boarder who comes and goes and acts as she pleases.”

“Please, Mama, I didn’t mean to make you so upset. The doctor—”

“Oh, so now it’s the doctor. Why didn’t you think of the doctor when you wanted to go live where girls do God knows what? Did you think about staying and caring for your mother’s health? Or about helping Charlie? He’s getting old too, and needs help. No, you don’t think about that. Call up the doctor. Go call the doctor. Tell him you don’t think about anyone but yourself. Tell him you don’t care.”

“Oh, Mama, okay, I’ve had enough. I’m sorry I ever mentioned it, I’m really sorry. But I had the right—”

“A right? Maybe, but first you have a duty. Now get your father’s fruit from the icebox and act decent.”

Carrie again became aware of her father’s presence. She looked at Charlie across the table. He seemed very relieved, so she smiled at him and got up to get his fruit. Charlie had always said you had to take a vine gently from the ground, little by little, after soaking it with water and waiting for the proper time. The grapes turned sour when the plant was torn from the earth too soon. Maybe it was so.

“Shall we have some soggy oranges or fat apples for dessert, Mrs. Dedarian?” She did see, she really did see, and she was going try, very hard.

FEBRUARY RAIN

Fall quickly, rain!
fall quickly—
oh, melt the frost
of winter wind,
sweep the air
in a silver rush!

Fall swiftly, rain!
fall swiftly—
and touch my heart
with liquid laughter.

Fall gently, rain,
fall gently—
and when you’ve gone,
leave quiet pools
of clear reflection.

—SUE WINGER