

A Safe Distance

by Jerry Ratch

There's always a poem that gets
left out in the cold,
an only child standing last in line
without a friend to hold his hand

No one knows his name
because he wasn't considered important
and maybe his name started with Z,
someone like Zimmer, or Zebra

and he had to grow garish black and white stripes
to be noticed at all
or acquire a peculiar odor maybe
like a skunk

and suddenly everyone runs
screaming from the room
and he moves up silently
to the head of the line

and eats all the sweet cakes
like the adorable, smiling little angel
he has suddenly become
as seen from a safe distance

Poems, who needs them? Maybe it was because no one
wanted them that I gave them away so freely
Maybe no one ever, in our time, really felt
they needed to have one, to stay alive

