

The Prayer Savant

MARK JARMAN

On a yellow legal pad
she wrote her rows of names
with a big carpenter's pencil
and made a sunny garden
of the block graphite letters.
Her parents brought people to her
one at a time through the day.
If you came to her with a name
and she caught something about you
with her cockeyed mask of attention
she would write your name down too.
And if you left her, feeling poorly,
I have heard from witnesses,
later on in the day
you might feel a sudden lightening.
She sat in her childhood bedroom
with Burl Ives on her record player
singing "Big Rock Candy Mountain"
and praying through her list,
praying through every name
and the names from the day before
and the day before that and before
and never forgot a name.
She remembered no one's face
but she never forgot a name.
Her parents had given her this
condition and occupation.
It was how they lived with themselves
and how their prayer was answered.