

Vesper Time

This is how I learned to love:

watching a couple climb

the twenty-five stairs

from Spoleto's old quarter

to the new, even on a day

it was so hot a dropped egg

fried on the stone steps.

Every afternoon at five,

they arrived at the *gelateria*,

he nearly blind, she guiding

him by the arm, they ordered

one scoop between them.

Some days *nocciola*, others

pistacchio or *amarena*.

Always at the same table

she would dip a plastic

spoon in the paper cup

and he would open his lips,

receive her offering

like a communion wafer.

Rarely talking, only looking

into each other's eyes.

Then they headed home

the way they came,

to the house I imagined:

painted *espresso* cups

on a cedar table,

lace doilies on sofa arms,

framed image of Santa Rita

di Cascia staring from a wall.

Another afternoon adrift

in their calendar of graces.