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POETRY OF CHARLES RAFFERTY

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Circling

A satellite tumbles over the back porch
like a tiny match you strike
and then blow out
and somehow strike again.

The air is thick with lilies.
Somewhere close, the Canada geese
are coming back, landing
on a lake of reflected stars.

We've got the kind of driveway
people use for turnarounds
whenever they're lost
or suddenly late. Inside

you sleep like moonlight
across a knife blade. On a kitchen counter
scattered with cut strawberries—
the wine we could not finish.

On My Forty-Second Birthday

I have reached an age I doubt I'll double.
When my daughters are this old
I'll likely be dead and they will be made
a little more alone—however married
or careered they may be, no matter
if their mother survives me. I'll want them
to recall the dinners when I tried
to teach them everything—the purpose
of chlorophyll, where the dinosaurs went,
the meaning of the Beatles. I like to think
they'll miss the Sunday calls,
the cards that followed them
as relentlessly as junk mail. It's possible
my death will come as a relief—
after a long cancer or dementia—
the money that's left finally theirs
to blow on vacation or an IRA. Tonight

the stars are in their usual place
and this is no solace. That my daughters must
endure this same desolation
floating above them like dazzling salt is
intolerable. They'll never have more
than a roof to shield them, the crackpot
wisdom of a man they knew.

New Mexico

We are driving a fence into the desert—
a strip of chain link and barbed wire
to keep out the Mexicans
and terrorists. It has none of the cachet
of the Great Wall or the Berlin Wall
or Hadrian's Wall. It doesn't even have
the power of the electrified fences
bisecting Korea. In fifty years
it'll just be rust on the broiling sand,
a symbol of something diminished.
The desert is the best barrier:
hundreds of miles of thirst and disorientation.
A fence says only that it's time
to dig or climb toward commerce,
toward lingerie and Cutty Sark,
toward preschool and fifteen-dollar copays—
that they've all but arrived
on the U.S. side of sand and desolation.
From a distance the fence
must look uncrossable. Up close,
for all its teeth, it is mostly made of air.

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Charles Rafferty is the author of four full-length collections of poetry: *The Man on the Tower* (University of Arkansas Press), *Where the Glories of April Lead* (Mitki/Mitki Press), *During the Beauty Shortage* (M2 Press), and most recently *A Less Fabulous Infinity* (Louisiana Literature Press). He teaches at Albertus Magnus College and in the MFA program at Western Connecticut State University. By day, he works as an editor for a technology consulting firm.