ANGELA SORBY

*Distance Learning*

They answered an ad,

FINISH SCHOOL BY CORRESPONDENCE,

so now I'm making six bucks an hour

teaching Practical English

to Benjy the Seventh Day Adventist who sells

*The \Vatchtower* in front of Dunkin' Donuts;

and to Annabella the third generation

contortionist in a one-ring circus;

and to Tim from Nome whose stick dance

makes fish rush to the surface of the sea.

Our textbook, revised in 1956,

calls English a "tool" as if it could conk Satan

over the head as he slunk out of Dunkin' Donuts.

Its rules are iron-clad, a chain of l's before E's

not bendable like the bones in a young body,

not sprung from monks and slaves and thieves.

I'm required to teach the text straight,

as if on a cold night outside Nome

an Athabaskan could smoke

salmon with wood from a grammar tree.

My students are remote as astrophysics:

stars and particle waves, the phenomenon

of light traveling over distance,

constructed from equations I can't trace

although our textbook ventures that someday

Americans will send a man into space.

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