

JEFF HARDIN

Concerning the Possibilities That Might Have Been

to *Al Maginnes*

Three more days till spring arrives, and I'm not sure I'll make it. This winter's been as fierce as any I remember. Subfreezing temps, the ice, the snow, the roads impassable for days, the gray-sky stillness that lingers on—I'm already thinking of the walks I'll take out back along the fencerow, my ritual each spring. Redbuds will be the first to flame against the drab woods line. Five by my last count, and each one is its own distinctive shape determined by the trees that nestle close. I suspect the same is true for us. Friends old and new influence how we bend ourselves toward the light, and I don't have to tell you how mysterious kinship is for any of us, especially when it just appears from nowhere, like a bloom, like a letter, like a stretch of time in which we see our lives for what they are: just one of countless possibilities that might have been—yet, even so, this only one. Well, we take what comes and make the best, and, yes, I mean that with an emphasis on *best*; and, yes, I mean that with an emphasis on *make*; for we construct, in part, the lives we find ourselves within; and that's another mystery. I may have never told you: I'm adopted. So when I read your poems about the child you make a home for, I read as one who knows what that will one day grow to mean for her, the staggering gift of being taken in and loved by strangers likewise incomplete. Any wholeness

will be found together, despite a litany of awkward words and gestures forgiven; and few truths mean as much to me as this one does. Now I've said it, the thing I've never thought or said before, the thing a child like me, become a man, can say at last with some authority, a truth I've learned in part from you: all of us are orphans finding homes. Our family, though, is growing larger, hopeful. We sing together songs and poems and psalms. We dance; we mourn. We whirl before the cosmos. We rearrange its stars; and when we say each other's names, we voice another holiness we couldn't know before, now trembling on the wind.