

## **Elizabeth Bishop's Birthday Bash, Hope Cemetery, Worcester, Massachusetts**

*Susan Roney-O'Brien*

On February eighth, drive through  
the main gate, take Curtis Ave.  
to your fourth left. Turn onto Beech.  
Proceed one block to where a leafless maple  
stands sentry. Her grave lies behind,  
the headstone strewn with pebbles.

Park. You're first, of course, so remain  
seated, reread the poem you picked.  
When others arrive, pull your jacket closed.  
Grab the poem you rolled into a cylinder  
and swing your knees together  
out the driver's side.

Bunch and gather. Someone points out  
a crow. You listen for his caw, but hear  
Canada geese, honking, swerve from the road  
and over the grave. The space fills:  
a table, a mic, a box of Joe, napkins,  
cups, paper plates, a knife, a birthday cake.

Someone reads "Filling Station." Another  
reader stands. The geese swirl up again  
as though they want to be part of it all.  
By your turn, the wind is blowing,  
the mic falls over. You set it upright,  
laugh, read your poem to the geese,

to the small crowd, the other readers,  
even to Elizabeth who lies so far below  
that if she didn't know the words by heart,  
she'd never know them. Then it's done.  
Coffee served, the majestic, frosted cake  
doled out, crumbs thrown for the crow.