

# Laying on of hands

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Only with dogs and children  
and sometimes a woman weeping  
on a bus station bench, hands  
folded across her face like a veil.

The stranger passing  
can only bring himself to stand  
beside her, allow his hand  
to settle on her shoulder, fingertips  
touching, then lifting, then lighting  
poised, muscles taut  
for flight at the first ripple.

Only in a public place:  
soldiers too sober to notice  
a plain woman on a bench.  
Widows on pensions, touring America,  
passes clutched deep in pants' pockets.  
College kids lost in travel diaries.

Only the janitor, himself invisible as khaki,  
sees as he kneels beside the bench  
to save his back retrieving  
the paper coffee cup—its handles  
the halves of a valentine,  
unfolding wings,

a woman rising  
in a man's overcoat, wiping her eyes  
with a wadded hankie and laughing  
at nothing . . . nothing at all.