

Three Poems for My Mother

Philip White

For Your Birthday: Planting in the Rain

Halfway through, a dogged rain
sluiced down, skin-slapping
and unseasonably cold, slopping the soil
at our shoes, filling the holes
with brown puddles showing plashed

glimpses of the sky's broken gray.
Then he pitched in, fell
to his knees in the slick mud,
splayed roots and sickened color
of his own hands in the holes so we,

sinking, too, in the slime and shivering,
could press soil around them and pour
in root starter he'd mixed in one of his womb-
shaped flasks. All this, near the end
of his five years' tenure in hell,

an existence in which every breath and move
meant suffering. And you stood by,
nervous at his exertion, suffering it,
the way a child must suffer forever
the mystery of his mother's love

and pain — suffering it,
because it was for you.

PHILIP WHITE lives in Provo, Utah. This collection of poems won second place in DIALOGUE's 1987 poetry awards.