

## The Dante Box

High on a radiator in our Minnesota kitchen,  
between the Frigidaire and a door to the basement,  
lay a long brown box with blue borders.  
'Dante Alighieri', in big blue letters,  
filled the length of the box.

I could almost reach that box.  
It seemed as long as I was tall.  
I knew not to touch it.  
If I pulled it down,  
everything in the Dante box would break.

My mother, born of an English crofter and a Polish Jew,  
locked in her midcentury midwestern marriage,  
had learned to make Italian Spaghetti.  
It made her a star in all her circles.  
Invitations to spaghetti dinners  
in our cluttered dining room  
were sought like winning lottery tickets.

In the Dante Alighieri box,  
long spaghetti strands rested.  
Mother could coil that spaghetti,  
without breaking it,  
into a giant pot of boiling water.  
One hand held the strands high,  
the other circling around the steam  
to lower pasta into the giant pot.  
Everyone watched.

Spaghetti boiled side by side  
with a smaller pot of sauce.  
Red tomato pulp churned, spat  
before being ladled over white spaghetti.  
It came to the table on flowered china,  
a composition soon cut into bits for eating.

Years later, far from many things I would not touch,  
I learned of Dante Alighieri, the treks he imagined.  
Like my mother, he knew  
we can find grace along the way.