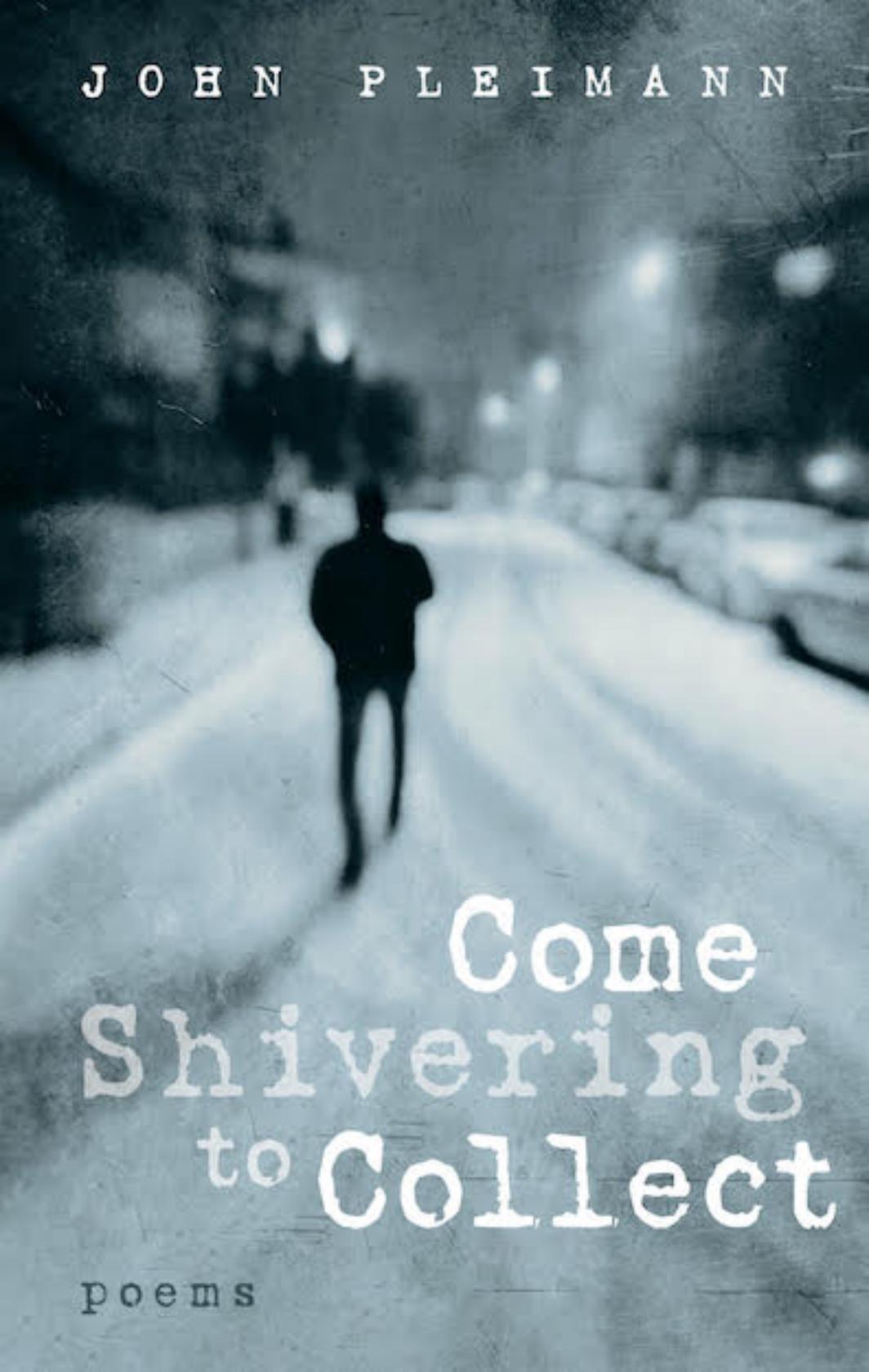


J O H N P L E I M A N N



Come
Shivering
to Collect

poems

“These finely crafted poems explore the rich diversity of life and do not shrink from the harsh realities of divorce, bewilderment, homelessness, or the stray dogs left behind. The poems are sometimes heartbreaking but also compassionate as they lean toward hope of rescue, of redemption. Pleimann writes of the harsh realities of life with a generous and open heart. He understands that words are like snakes we sleep with and handles them carefully.”

—MICHAEL HOGAN

Author of *In the Time of the Jacarandas*

“John Pleimann is a magician of words that come alive on the page, just as does the child in ‘Come Shivering to Collect,’ who shows up at his door to collect, but instead ends up giving him a prized stone and an unforgettable poem. In his precision to invite the mysteries of words to reveal their hidden meanings, his readers are drawn into a mysterious world where every word is a spell in itself, a waking dream, ‘a dark corner / where love and loathe are trying to couple.’ Pleimann is not only an astonishing poet, but a memorable teacher who opens the curtains of the page to reveal unexpected truths.”

—HOWARD SCHWARTZ

Author of *The Library of Dreams: New & Selected Poems 1965–2013*

“The poems in *Come Shivering to Collect* brilliantly display that ‘within restraint lies great intensity,’ as William Butler Yeats observed. The compression of each line in these poems as it unfolds, enfolds, and refolds the language tells us something that we have never heard before. The beauty of the execution is often so direct, often so simple, they can turn a simple child’s game of ‘you’re it’ into a revelation of aging, loss, and alienation. *Come Shivering to Collect* is poetry at its finest.”

—WALTER BARGEN

First Poet Laureate of Missouri

“Pleimann confronts the difficulty, confronts the shock of the *unknown-brought-forth*, confronts the swervings and close-calls that equal each waking day, that equal a life in poem after brilliant poem. Readers often turn to philosophy for *truth*, but find it, as they will here, more often, more candidly, and more movingly in poetry.”

—ERIC PANKEY

Professor of English, Heritage Chair in Writing,
George Mason University

Come Shivering to Collect

Come Shivering to Collect

Poems

John Pleimann



COME SHIVERING TO COLLECT

Poems

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*For Amy, my pups Maxie, Welkin, Joco, and Rusty,
my family and friends.*

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I.

SYLLABIC

As if sound were sense enough,
my tongue today insisted *succulate*
a word. It was a mouth meaning,
juice of *succubus* and *succulent*
a word between, a word my tongue
lay down with in the dark.

I nipped it, rubbed it against *suckle*,
let it nurse me after my wife explained
with rhetorical precision the marriage
was gone. *Succulate* stayed moist.

Anymore, the words that speak for me,
are close but closed to reason, the nano-
syllabic, the ones only I can hear
as in *succulate* and its overtones:
you suck, you suck too late,
too late, sucker.

LOVE WOULD BE GOOD

Ben was a bad student.
I planned to tell him so,
to explain that his poem “How
to Urinate” was unworthy
of urinal graffiti.

I was six months divorced,
eleven months without
a woman’s embrace, no one
to call if I awoke into
the dead eye of night. I
had no heart to be direct.

Five weeks straight I taught
my class the power of tone, irony,
connotation, how nothing
could be told straight because
nothing ever was what it seemed.

“Words are lies,” I thundered
like a prophet, “even words
from the heart. You can spend
your life pushing words around
and find you were chasing
what you could only say
without them.”

Those five weeks I found myself
spread around the house:
bruised pears in a splintered bowl,
the red zero on my answering machine,
dead flies caught between the screen
and window.

It was time to make tropes.
The book suggested *Love is*.
Love is like. I said,
“It’s been overdone. What about
Loneliness is or Stupidity is like,”
but no one looked at me

except for Ben, who had never
looked away, Ben who had not read
the assigned chapter but read
my eyes and in his dreamy, drawn-
out voice said “Yeah, love
would be good,” and in a voice
softer and dreamier than his,
I agreed, as if I had heard myself
from far away,

as if the bad student in me knew
it was time for the teacher to learn
an easy answer the hard way.

COME SHIVERING TO COLLECT

A child with a full moon face
stands at my front door.
He has come to collect for something
to which I must have agreed.
The lines of his open palm
branch toward me.

He cannot say what I owe,
as if to reveal would lose me,
and I am all he has left.
He looks at my address and weeps.

I reach for my wallet,
but his eyes confess he has
nothing to win, no goal,
no quota, no one to hold him
accountable.

He takes from inside his mouth
a smooth stone and puts it
in my palm, folds my fingers
and whispers to my fist.

The moon tonight hangs bruised
and full, streetlights
flicker on. This child,
come shivering to collect,
turns away in silence.

The stone grows cold and heavy
in my fist, my fist
which will not open,
even though I command it.