Walt wore green trousers to school today, a little tattered and short but baggy enough to get by, his ankles sharp wings above his shoes, Hermes delivering his little sister to kindergarten. She’s in a green cardigan over green t-shirt; she hates to be pinched. She isn’t sure her classmates will eat the guacamole we made this morning for Green Tasting Day, and Amber, of course, is bringing green popcorn. I mention snakes and pagans, an island as green as the Hulk, but they look at me as if my hair is on fire, a peat fire in late winter, a cache of flames above my ears. When St. Patrick left home a slave, a stolen child in the service of thieves, the fairies discerned a narrow faith and let him be, let him labor and escape. If only leprechauns possessed a missionary instinct. If only they’d kept him in a bower counting shades of green. If seen now in these days of Falwell and Robertson, if found beneath a garden stone or taking shelter in the heather, the little people are menacing and mean, as apt to boil a child as enchant him. Driven underground by Patrick’s return, they await a different rapture, or the same one differently, happy enough with an eternity bound over to the earth, the smear of chlorophyll on their cheeks as they walk among the heathens,
who believe what they see and little else. The fairies require no one’s belief. The leprechauns play tricks on the damned or the saved. Patrick taught the Trinity by counting the leaves on a shamrock, how three things could be as one, then handing it to a druid to hold, to consider. So when, after school, Phoebe announces that, yes, everyone loved the guacamole, and Walt hands out his paper shamrocks inscribed with messages, I think of spring, three days away, which this year falls on Palm Sunday, the day Walt was born eight years ago. Did a nurse give me the small cross of bent fronds or did I find it under his pillow, right next to a four-leaf clover, a gift from an uncle who has never believed, though he took the time to search in his yard for a present. Faith and luck: one found everywhere, the other as rare as air at the bottom of the sea. Both are in his baby book, right next to a footprint and a bracelet that reads Baby Boy Harms. Right now he wants to eat the green cupcake his teacher gave him before the final bell. Phoebe is looking out the window counting clouds aloud in Spanish, which means there can only be ten. Ten clouds in the sky, though from where I sit, there are hundreds.
We Started Home, My Son and I

*after Jaan Kaplinski*

We started home, my son and I.
Evening beginning. The small stains
of streetlight spreading across the sidewalk,
thinning to darkness every few yards.
My son paused at the edge of each
then leapt, one hand in mine,
to the next. Ahead, his mother
touched the meat twice before
turning it, rinsed the lettuce, called out
for his sister to wash her hands.
He said each spot of light
was a great land, each span
of darkness the sea. And we
followed his map home
out past the edge of town where night
filled the long blocks between
streetlights with oceans.
We rowed when we could, swam
the last few miles. Until the moon
reared up like an old man
startled from his nap. And once
again the roads of the world rose
beneath us. Before long, my son
and I were home. I watched him climb
the brick stairs to the front door,
whose key I no longer owned.
His mother waved as he fell
into the house, the bright rooms
splashed with light. The ottoman covered with horsehair; a damask draped over the sofa: I couldn’t see these or any other emblems of my previous life. I felt the waters rise around my feet, heard in the distance the loose rigging in the wind, a buoy bell. So far from the sea, I rolled up my trousers, wading in for the walk back.