

The Ogontz Branch

by Bill Yarrow

There are stories I will not tell, stories I shudder
to remember. You'll forgive me for withholding them from you.
You may, of course, not tell me everything about yourself either.

A violation of intimacy? To me it seems its guarantee.
What I mean is we can tell each other anything,
but we don't have to. A string is stronger for its knots.

It's not that I prefer living in a house with a locked door.
That's not what I mean. What I mean is
did I ever tell you about the Ogontz Branch?

I mean the Ogontz Branch of the Philadelphia Library.
It was on Ogontz Avenue between Old York Road
and Limekiln Pike. Thirty years ago, it was old and run down.

It wasn't close to where I lived, but I used to love
to go there afternoons after school. I'd drive over,
hang out, read the paperbacks. No one there knew me.

I made friends with the librarian, a young woman
from Conshohocken with an odd, cocky smile.
Part of her job was shooing out the boozy bums.

It was in the Ogontz Branch where I discovered *Intimacy*
by Jean-Paul Sartre. A book of five longish tales,
the only stories Sartre ever wrote. With eyes blazing,

I devoured them. I ate without tasting, speeding through them
like a starving man before a meat buffet, but back then
I read many books I said I loved but didn't understand.

Back then that was perhaps the point—to race through the pages,
to engulf, to possess the book—that, I felt, was the true thing!
It would be decades before I understood what I had missed.

If I am a book, I am *Intimacy*. Read me. Wrinkle my pages.
I am not asking for understanding. If you want to check
me out, ask the head librarian of the Ogontz Branch.

