

JAMES TATE

The Roses

When I got home from work, there were a dozen long-stem, red roses on my porch. They were beautiful, but I couldn't find a note. I looked everywhere, but there wasn't so much as a name. I took them inside and placed them in my best vase with water. I put the vase on my dining room table. It wasn't my birthday and I hadn't done anybody any big favors lately. I tried to think of every possible woman who might conceivably have any reason whatsoever to give me roses. I rejected every name that came to mind. It was making me crazy, I couldn't think of anything else. An unknown admirer? A mystery woman? I looked in the mirror. Impossible! My unknown admirer would have to be a real hag. Some sick-o left them here as a not so thinly veiled threat. Red roses symbolizing blood. I thought of calling the police. "Yes, Officer, someone left red roses on my porch and I fear for my life. Yes, of course, you will check with all area florists and track down all those persons who have purchased red roses within the last forty-eight hours." Instead, I locked the doors and pulled all the shades. I had never done one thing knowingly to offend the Mafia. A little guy like me, what do they want? I don't even know anyone in the Mafia. Maybe

that's the problem. I'm probably dealing with
them all the time and don't even know it.
My whole life flashes by. I'm guilty. I'm guilty.
I'm guilty. Still, not the red roses, not yet,
not now.