

Crying Under Water

by Marietta Ball

Pleased not to
be informed there are
no new messages,
he opens a forward
from his twelve-year-old daughter
and reads the entire list of
drolly pointless speculations,
pausing to ponder one
about the possibility of
crying under water.

He regrets he told acquaintances
to stop sending silly trivia;
he's come to the
place now where he welcomes any
e-mail. Ironically,
he never goes to the sites
pushing his wife to outrage,
despair and separation.
She accused him of withdrawing into
a world of virtual everything.
He feels she did not try
to help him forge a way out.

The internet requires
too much effort. He resorts
to couch and TV
after the daily check for e-mail.
Except for his little girl,
the only people
who have kept him in their
address books are
two unlikely women from work.
His boss, a rigid, mirthless
matron, seldom acknowledging him
in person, sends
page after page of jokes about
politics and rednecks
and the hilarities of growing old.
A nondescript part-timer,
a young devoted wife and mother,
sends little religious
stories of encouragement
as well as warnings about dangerous
consumer practices
and products.