

## SECRET PASSAGE

~After a photograph by Helen  
Levitt: *New York, c.1940.*

If pressed, this button would ring  
and ring and ring. But then what? It is,  
after all, no ordinary doorbell, is it?  
And so it rings at the end of an impossibly  
long corridor, in a room without a door  
but with one window looking out  
onto a grassy, walled courtyard,  
where there's never any sound  
of the harsh breath of traffic,  
where no wind stirs the carnival-colored  
beds of roses, snapdragons,  
where of course it is always twilight,  
where at the center, repeating  
and repeating itself, is a perfectly  
clipped maze of dark green privet,  
from whose heart, floating up,  
one might swear there are voices.  
This button—chalked on a brick  
wall like a small white sun  
encircled by two wobbly orbits  
of planets somehow omitted  
or just forgotten. Only too well  
we know how it teases us,  
causes that slight tingle in the tip  
of the index finger, tempted as we  
are to reach out, to touch it—  
a child calling to us. But always  
at the last instant we pull back,  
wanting the letters written so clearly

and right beside it to go on and  
on casting their spell, beckoning  
as if to us alone:

BUTTON TO  
SECRET PASSAGE  
PRESS  
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