

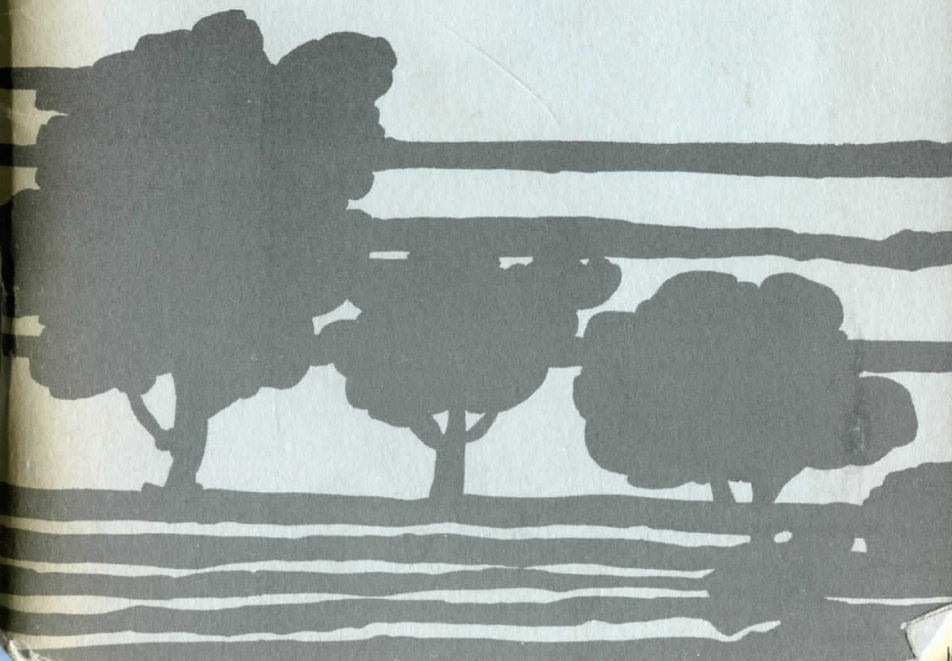
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In This Morning

Claudia Scott





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In This Morning

Claudia Scott

First Frog Press
P.O. Box 1000
Chicago, Illinois 60602

THE
MORNING



In This Morning

Claudia Scott

Tree Frog Press
P.O. Box 25125
Chicago, Illinois 60625

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In This Morning

The sun is up
and the birds are singing
and the flowers are blooming
and the world is bright
and the day is new
and the heart is glad
and the soul is free
and the spirit is soaring
and the love is true
and the hope is bright
and the faith is strong
and the courage is bold
and the patience is long
and the kindness is sweet
and the mercy is deep
and the grace is free
and the love is true
and the hope is bright
and the faith is strong
and the courage is bold
and the patience is long
and the kindness is sweet
and the mercy is deep
and the grace is free

1877
1878

My Mother's Graduation Picture

by rare dispensations
through a certain mood of air
from certain angles, the light
glances across those specific shapes,
the mouth and perfect teeth
nose, cheekbones, brow:
the face that is
my brother's face in hers,
the light, in passing, glances,
homing on her eyes
the shape, the set, the color
of her eyes are his
the look is mine
an attitude of other possibilities
she has a way about her,
utter unpredictability
the light laughs from her eyes
and over the determinations
of his face in hers
a held breath in the wind
slowly released, moves air, again
the light glows in her smile
wells up, replenished
in a grandchild's happy laugh
reverberating, surging
over years: her validation
and she smiles again
my brother's smile

Watching for Planes Along the Lake

the planes come in low over the lake at dusk
come slowing softly through the softening air
come calling their way, floating, finally
hanging overhead above the gurgling suck
of water in the crevices of rock, above
the slap and chop of water further out
they have come straining in the indistinct
grey distances of water and the sky,
imaginings of vaguely more intense
grey minutes moving across travailing time
become huge shadows in the dark above my head
above the waves that crash and roar now on the bar
the planes hum in low over the lake
towards darkness hunching on the shoulders of the trees

Recognizing Rain

the whole trick with rain
is recognition, and its whole use
where why how is this rain falling
finely grey, translucent, quicksilver
from thin invisibly grey clouds
a silent movement in the air
light and dark changing
this rain is most noticeable
afterwards, the air dries suddenly
bright white, a breaking weather
or dark feathers trailing from
low hanging heavily wet clouds
a wetness in the air between
huddled and saturated clouds
wet brightness of the air, orange
at the end of shining grey framed air
rain without, or with, raindrops falling
what rain have you settled into
where, in what place in your life
does it seem natural, at home
does it belong, begin
this cognition of rain
night sounds, restless fitful
skitterings of leaves, of cold
air at the window but outside
a slight infringing in the
afternoon, unhurried, gathers
in large drops from dripping trees

a stark grey rain, a curtain
muffling calm familiarities of sight
and sound, a cold cloak pacing on
the other side of rattling glass
the half hour before closing driven
in a wind rising to pay the bill
one day its use will arrive whole
in uncertainty at last rain
recognizing where you are
exactly how you stand

Hand and Mind

1. the hands fascinate us first
so tiny, yet exactly
to the fingernails that need to be cut
hands, waving in the air
in movements like our own
erratically controlled, but like our own
the fingers curl around, hold on
2. for months
a physical delight in motion, in sound
kicking one foot in the air, against the crib
holding the other, gurgling vowels
bounced on a knee and shrieking
in a walker kicking both feet on the floor
and moving, sideways, doing it again
the hand placing block on block
and knocking them down
smiling broadly, "no no no"
sound
words
the mind dawns on us in words
3. imitated sounds
that sound fine and exciting
that produce useful, desired results
that identify, sort out and organize
all these things
words to be insistently
acquired, "name, Daddy, name"
combined and recombined in sentences
that sound like ours, and stories
that don't always quite make sense
that sound like dreams

like trying to recall and tell a dream
"a woman who was not quite Nancy,
traveling with me in the old blue Ford
on the railroad tracks"
it all made sense without words
as an image dreamed, before
with the morning, language as a clutch
engages again hand and mind.

4. thinking in words

what can be said
what will be possible once said
what there is any point to saying
how to say it
sequences, progressions
one step, one manipulation
one word at a time
cause and effect, change
word inflection, syntax
hand and mind

5. words, therefore mind

but stories that don't make sense
what is going on
behind these exciting fine words strung
and flung and heaped up all together
wonderfully outrageous objects, animals,
relationships, things to be doing,
reasons to be doing them
mind, obviously, actively, mind
in its morning, in its own life
thinking anything that can in any way
be said, for the delight of thinking
and of saying it

Green Summer with El Train

the trees have caught an el train
burgeoning green suddenly
is closing over!
in new labyrinths of leaves
the speed of light has faltered
temporarily diffracted images arrive late
rain falls finely green

green
lightly slips between
creeps round, bursts through
ballooning

white and green steel, freed
the el train rushes grumbling
brushing through
the thickenings of leaves

You Do Not Yet Know What She Is Doing

You wrote that you hoped to understand
A slip of paper and forgotten
You were doing doing
Purposely a good intention
You had made a note to understand
What is she doing
She is doing something yes of course
She must be doing something
Some things she likes
And is likely to be doing
What are your intentions
Sitting knitting and unoccupying
Idly eyeing earing
Have you quite done
Not appearing airing
Caring Herring
To some things are up
To sum things up
Know you do not
Stand under standing
Still stilled stilling still
She defies and deifies denying
What she will be doing
You will lose your faith
Knot your intentions
Mind it does not slip your mind
Did you not note to understand

The Waves

in a dark night, moments
as their darker night dreams rising
memories strung on my name,
with their persistent questions,
like the window, loose and rattling,
passing, masquerade
where do they turn, becoming visible
a life, whole, ice clear and coherent, real?
where do I and this life stand face
to face? how will I know when,
as a wave hangs, hangs and suddenly
breaks, it comes to be mine
along a rock beach
hard waves shatter spraying glass
odd phrases scattered
in our evenings, midnights
early mornings along several beaches
over half a year
come back collaged
a conversation in ellipses
saying all there is to say
a groping after wholeness
for the hollow in the saying of the word.
what has this woman of three summers past
an image in a memory
to do with me?

flatness of distant water
how a wave swells lucid thin green
slides the surface, rushes onto shore
a long wave breaks like dominoes
surf running along sand
small waves fold, toss and fold between
green water, white water
a wave over and over

at odd intervals for years
a blueness at the
lengthening ends of days
a thin tune whistled in the wind,
the air light as if snow
were falling, glass wool
and the whitest blue white light;
a keen excruciating blueness
sharp silk
at the ends of some days
softly draws out one slow breath
one moment almost, in this
strange light, clearing

and this moment of my life
that is my life keeps passing
passing as the waves pass
on the sand a grain of sand
back and forth
back and forth

Driving All Night

drove all night again
I always think somehow
in daylight when I start out
that I will be tired by
evening, ready to stop
driving for the night

me, tired of
driving at night
handling this car on this road
this three hundred feet
of empty black road
fence line, an occasional mailbox
black air

I'm not tired
some thought turning
with the engine's rhythm
with the hum of tires
their sound, one sound
in this still night, in my mind
one thought revolving
has set up momentum
has wiped out
as night the landscape
blackness emptying
of every other thing
except this one thing driving
this car on this road
this thought round in my mind

and still not tired
enough exhausted to sleep
though the hour runs
slowly up hill, the sound
rising, slipping over
down, keeps moving
so still, so alone outside
I could keep driving
keep driving all night
in blackness
into this fantastical cool blackness
bring to, keep at bay this ache
this mind and nerves, this one
thought, circling
keep from tumbling
is this light thinning the sky
I drove all night again
drove all this lovely balmy night
drove through
I'm tired
it is light and
morning will be breaking

If I Lose You

I have become quite a good loser
I can smile, congratulate and smile
yes, I'm quite competent at losing
gracefully, that is painlessly
that is, hardly knowing anymore
I'm losing
years now with nothing in my life
I couldn't afford to lose
it's like not losing
it is not losing
the losing all done years ago
deliberately
eliminating that capacity
of course I don't want to lose
but since it always seems to happen
at least I can be prepared
but I don't want to lose you
smiling, painlessly, with a good grace
because
after all
and it is only
I don't want not to lose
if I lose you

For My Niece

My brother is a Christian man
a good man, he loves his wife
His words are awkward, he does not
articulate his feelings easily or well
His hands are skillful and adept
he makes wood live, he will make
marvelous toys to say he loves you
He is earnest and sincere, a gentle man
his hands will discipline but not abuse
He loves his wife, he is devoted to
he would do anything for her good
for he is her head as Christ is his
My brother is a Christian man
He loves you already, has prepared
himself, his wife to bring you his
daughter up to be a Christian woman
subject to her husband and the Lord
he would do anything for you

I don't know whether to be happy or sad
If you had been a boy he would
bring you up to be a Christian man
to love your wife and children, gently
firmly leading them along the right path,
to be steadfast, righteous, a good man
My father is a Christian man

So why do I despair before rejoicing
concerned how you will grow up
this night you have been born
alive and healthy

I grew up there
Linda did, Joan did
Virginia, Penny, Barbara
Cindy, Marti, Frances
in some variation did
and none of us the woman we were
raised to be, and none unscathed

I will be your eccentric aunt
not often mentioned, different,
fundamentally pleased with my life,
kept to your peripheral vision
but decidedly, persistently there
my own woman
For your father is a Christian man

Acoustics at the Women's Coffeehouse

in sequestered silence
only by appreciating
the affinity of separate silences
stillnesses magnifying stillnesses
for centuries has this space ever
been achieved

how can these sounds
of laughter, conversations
notes from a guitar
exclude only distractions

the essence has been
realized and saved

a habit of regard, exactly
a respectfully declining
to disturb, intrude, impose
upon another

not the silence
but the keeping of
our silences
our sounds

In an Absence of Mirrors, Expectations of Black Holes

Having arranged
the angle and the lines
between positions of the chairs,
considered silences and reservations,
the selected distance
of a word withheld,
we have established
resonance against all
probabilities of vortex,
rites of unshared spaces
their frontiers not guarded
by a camouflage of mirrors
and need fear no dissolution
Turning on an open hand
the subtle possibilities of points
themselves are what they seem
In unreflecting distance
I imagine all your life

A Few Days Before My Younger Sister's Birthday

I was on my nonchalantly resigned
way through mental purchasing
and mailing deadlines, once again
in this year, boggled,

conjuring some way to let you
know I do remember

I remember

years of birthday celebrations
I have not been home for;
mailed great-aunt-gifts
— the more exotic the less chance
you will already have, or want, one;
years of wishes that whatever your
hopes for this birthday year may be
you may achieve them twice

resigned

again, in this year, knowing
we have grown as we were born
to be such different persons

when your round robin birthday card
came in the mail, a veritable nest
of envelopes and papers
leafing through I find

the hometown postmark headed south
instructions from the brother who began
it all, the card with signatures
a second brother's address in another
sister's hand, beneath two stamps now
notes to one another, added
on to one another's notes

a note for you

around a tone decided
by the one you're closest to
we've bantered each one's few words
to this web of wishes
this collage, this odyssey
at last and after years
it's come to me

that you have caught up
you have all come through
grown up and become at last
as old as I

I sign the card, with love
with my few words
and with relief

in the company of friends

an evening coming down in
purples, spread fine, stretches over
dinner, after-dinner coffee
aging around wine and cards
around our jests, our jousting
word play, between bluffs quietly
called, a shoulder turning, rises
in a movement perfectly
familiar, smoothly fitting
as an overlay at every
point that movement's printed image
on my mind, shapes in this air
a swift keen joy of my life
catching, as a breath too icy
sharp, thin to be held is still held
lingering as this pleasure
in the company of friends

Names

quite suddenly
this story ceases to seem strange:
there was that moment,
there was that one moment
registering, the beginning

it begins with names
repeatedly in wildly different conversations
hearing friends' and their friends'
known and unknown names
with recognizing, picking up on
the same dozen names of friends
acquiring histories, your friends, who
so the story goes, once
and their friends, "whom you have to meet
or should have you'd have gotten on
she was a character
went off to England a few years ago, and
anyway, we haven't seen her since
though any time, I wouldn't be surprised"
with wondering
with listening
for the links, the legends
it begins with names

there was no apparent reason
as it happened
my life happened within
certain expectations and
I was accepted

there is an informal code
we do have certain expectations
that don't have to be defined
a context in which our behavior
is, if not predictable, at least
consistent, on consideration
reasonable, not out of line
a core of mutual familiarity
experience and allusion
the whole point is that our lives
should not be alien and strange

a place, a presence
reckoned on, space figured
into conversation for my words

for stories that begin not to need
endings, that include your name
that hesitate into the question
"you were here then, weren't you" were you
it's become hard to remember
just when it began
the relativity of this chronology has been accepted
what must and what does not
have to be true to be true

there was a beginning
a point in this roll of names
when my name joined
but it no longer matters
I have been accepted
I belong from the beginning
to the end my name will
have its own existence

"you'd have liked her
but she moved, east somewhere
she puts in an appearance
once a year of so"

and still no completely
comprehensively apparent reason
certain expectations
that can't be defined
a group of friends, a web
of legends, a network of names

hearing names

this moment slides and
I have suddenly remembered
different, and the same, the same
we move on, we move each other on
quite reasonably
to new old names
the whole point is
and our lives are not strange
you know this story
it begins with names

One Evening at the Club

"Yes, I know who you mean. She comes here two or three times a week, always in that black tailored suit and tie like Romaine Brooks or Djuna Barnes, a vision from the twenties, with white hair. She seems to like that table, sits alone — she's never here when there's a crowd — I've only seen her talk with someone once. I'd guess she knows the bartender, she stays 'til closing. Now I think of it, this is the only club I've ever seen her in. That's all I know, what everybody knows. She's one person I can't introduce you to. But what's your interest?"

"I just wondered. Thought I might be seeing things — the club ghost, or what have you."

"No, she's very real. For all the good it does. There's Karen; let me buzz off and say hi. I'll get back later."

"No rush."

a slow night, it's nasty out
if she has any sense she won't be here
although, perhaps she has a car too — an old car,
she wouldn't want to drive it on a night like this
just to the bar I wonder, can she still afford
a car and does she even drive
I don't know that I would who needs it when
you've somehow managed to become
that old Pat will! she'll drive defiant as
all hell right into heaven's gate, death's door

she sits so straight and so relaxed
at home here, quite
yet something in her eyes, poised, always
watching a well bordered ease couchant
whom is she watching
watching for? her level neutral gaze
negotiates the room Pat and her friends are
smartly dressed, through possibly a bit
more casually than the group
by this wall interesting, exciting, not
flamboyant; up on all the latest, a set, absolutely
true to form a couple at a slightly
separated table, there, and there,
smiles and low laughs
as it was in the beginning, is now and ever,
god no wonder she feels just as much at home as I

"Again, please, scotch and water.
Tell me, who's the older woman
at the table, over there, tonight"

"Her name's Louise. Beyond that
I don't know any more about her than
about you. Though if you become a member,
I dare say you'd get to know her."

will she know now
I've been watching her her hands
laid on the table, a ring quiet on each
bony hand, thin fingers, polished nails
she lifts her left hand, trembling, to her chin
and leans back a minute disturbance passing
through the muscles of her face she smiles
seeing, hearing
a plangent present, richness, images

remembering names and where she's met
a person, whom she's going home with —
the whole game here.

I'd go home with her

"But what's she doing here then?"

"Oh I didn't talk with her, she wouldn't
care a fig about me."

"Good. Come on, I'll introduce you to a
sweet young friend of Karen's who cares
several figs, a cluster at the least,
a tree-full if you're at all appreciative
— which please be, 'cause if you're not
I am, and I don't need that. She's been
watching you all night — attention
wandering in the middle of her sentences,
the whole bit — and you wouldn't
give her half a glance. Young idiot.
It's almost closing time, but we'll
go on somewhere. Melinda, Chris.
And you know Karen and the rest.

"Jesus, it's pouring, shall we run,
here you two, take the keys, you'll
beat me by a mile, just have the car
warm by the time I get there."

Mourning Poem

I just heard
a bit of newsprint
falling from my brother's letter
words catching my eye

Obituaries Dr. R.J. Millemann
your father died

I don't know any longer where you are
I've no idea what your last
relationship was with your father
in what state concerning you he died
so this is not a letter
or for you, or even for the doc
— I haven't seen him in ten years

this is for me
this grief is for *my* father
who is in good health
with reasonable expectation
of a decade or two more of life

we always argued
read and thought and argued
he was shaping my mind
so was I
we thought in different ways
argued for years
then last year quarreled

my father's voice breaks on the phone
unreconciled reproaches to each other
we can't talk, can't even argue anymore

I just now heard
your father is dead
and I have been grieving the loss
of my father who is still alive
and leaving my life
an appalling understanding
a relief: there has been reason
adequate for this intensity of pain
we have lost access to each other's lives
it is appropriate to mourn my father now
I do not know what more I can lose
what more I will be able to mourn
when my father dies

Friends Who Were Lovers Formerly

they, having been,
are now absolved

of the prerequisite
to mention, to survey
establish, place
those spaces in between
they have no part

there is no country to be charted
or interpretations made
no awkward inference
can possibly intrude

arrangements, explanations, sureties
none are required
they had been
there are reasons they aren't now

The Truth About Love

like a mœbius band
the outside slides
in and back out

this old need of
the superfluous, the dreaming:
it was so hard to be let alone
to be resolved

to fall asleep to wake up
on my own to fall asleep again
alone momentum and will
do run down

if I could dream
if I could only stop and
alone in my intimately vast sleep
smile, dream

her aloneness
recognizes mine
a whole and
an appreciation of
the whole

astounding

like a mœbius band
at last alone is
together is again alone

Dear Publisher, Dear Printer

Strangely, but oh how enjoyably
I find myself appreciating,
as an unfamiliar
and yet rightful territory,
your joy of these words
their solidly brown sharpness
shaped, extruded
merely standing out from
this cream colored page
by corners absolute
and clearly square held.

This is not a new thing.
Since illuminated manuscripts
since words themselves were drawn
there have been instances
enough to say traditions
ink and paper have been
loving obviously every line
regardless of the meaning of
the choice of this particular word:
any word could look as well
and not sound worthy.

Long now I have held
this so well-made book
in my hands, my eyes
fearing almost to trust
its words to hold my mind.

Continually Approaching Notre Dame

what is my way
how best approach her?
winding narrowly through
side streets of late afternoons,
if I come suddenly upon her
glimpsing and confused
with promises, might I be
briefly introduced?

her towers track me through the town,
know early Sunday morning
that I cross the river in a light rain
watch distantly and turn away —
how abdicate these years of
expectations crowding in my hands!

thin watered sunlight rapidly
again slips stone to stone to dusk
across her distant face
across the square, the visitors
certain as tides surge in and out
once in a lifetime, and gone

"Notre Dame n'est pas un musee..."
what is my way? I watch

a flash of flying yellow hair
arrested briefly in a pausing pose
in weight on one leg resting
one thumb in her pocket
a young woman watching sunlight
for a moment stops by Notre Dame
and whirling lightly over
a low wall runs on

lightly across the square
through arches, arching grey
through grey stone vaults of
still air, echoing my footsteps
breathing and absorbed in old stone
in this ancient moment my way is
approaching, beckoning, continually
becoming, as these stones

All Post Cards Eagerly Accepted

I

through the letter slot
George Caleb Bingham's "Raftsmen Playing Cards"
I know before I turn it over who it's from
we spent an afternoon, oh years ago,
discussing the geometry in pictures, focus
and perspective as part of the meaning
"The museum is open again, thank the curator
I took the afternoon off, went to look
at pictures, at relationships that have
been fixed and aren't going to change
as soon as I begin to understand."

there was one of his letters
sometime between these two afternoons
"In each relationship exist points
of dissolution, like land mines
we may detect, map and avoid them
they may be so distant they are
no threat, simply there"

I still don't agree completely
but I do remember, draw the inference
he counts on how well in our long
friendship I have come to know him
how developed and accessible
the idea of him is in my mind

II

I asked why she hadn't written!
"it's been so damned long since
we touched base with each other"
since that image of me in her mind
had much to do with her life
since my idea of her changed
"and our lives, at least mine
has been expanding at a furious rate"
has been shared, puzzled into, comprehended
daily in the company of friends
whose everyday lives pulse with hers
when we talked daily "we shared something
but I can't remember the last time I saw you."
my letter came back stamped
Not here. No forwarding address on file.
I know now

III

the neglect and disuse
of allusions, references
reaffirmations of a personal
value and continuing vitality
in what it was we shared
assuming these are still there to be reaffirmed
I don't read minds
you have to let me know
send post cards
carbons, print-outs
of my moments in your mind

IV

"Again our letters answering each other's
questions have crossed in the mail.

If we can just sustain such eagerness
you haven't been gone long"

a year, two years

in the context of expecting we will not
again live near each other, no, not long
and what can be sustained?

what has the resonance to carry
to be shared in separated lives

"Thanks for the background.

It does make your everyday life clearer."

circumstances are already being lost

and mostly let them go

we can't tell everything

we could exhaust our interest trying

but she asked a question

what I want to sustain

is her perspective, her long view

of me, my life, what I have been

what I have expected to be

and thereby her prerogative

her earned right and ability

as an old friend to call me on

what I am doing

Triptych: For a Good Woman Poet

I

The time had to be exactly right
two separate times, and different
The awareness — the place is the same — was easy
but the separation before the connection:
that discontinuity of time
I couldn't get it right
It wasn't clear
I finally stopped, just left
the two or three rough lines there, stand-ins
called the poem done
and almost right

A week later
reading a new much anticipated volume
by a poet whose work I admire
there was my poem! with the times right
Oh, not quite my poem
She put in in a larger frame
the emphasis was different,
and the resolution
but she caught exactly
that effect, that pulled up short
experience, that chunk taken out of time
She's a considerably better poet
than I'll ever be
I can't feel too chagrined
and she just wrote this poem
Can I see how; is it again the detail

she chooses the exact details
and not one too many
I was trying to do that
So bring the poem back, keep trying
study her work further and then
think again about those different times

II

She writes well
assembles the exact sounds
textures, smells, significances
of the subject and we read
as though remembering
events, experiences we had not
realized to be remarkable before
She writes in personal
but never private terms

She has been studiously acquiring
these skills over forty years;
her poems continue to improve
Without doubt she has learned from others
She acknowledges her mentors, one man
in particular, is grateful for his
and his proteges' continued
sponsorship of her career
Each book she's written
has been well reviewed, sold out,
received a prize, deservedly
She writes well

Increasingly successful for a poet
she remains a private woman
who makes few appearances

At readings she seems ill at ease
she mumbles, does not phrase,
does not present her poems, in fact,
reads as though they were completely
unfamiliar and quite separate
from this rather frumpy woman
inexplicably, unwittingly on stage

That skill has also been acquired
over sixty years of being a good woman
properly dissociating her perceptions
of the general experience from her self
Her poems are accessible
refreshingly devoid of private fears
obsessions, fantasies, quirks
She does not obtrude
She writes well
is accepted, poet among poets
woman among men

III

Her life is her own business
I appreciate diversity, choice
I don't have to know all its details
I don't need, don't want each woman
whose work, or each woman,
I admire to be just like me
but she is on stage being deferential
to men, fitting herself while in public
to their image of a woman poet
(men also agree: what she keeps
private is of course her business)
holding up that image

to a younger woman poet
as the way to be accepted
taken seriously as a poet, read
an image that is not at all like me

She may be right

The few women, praised
proclaimed to be good women poets,
who proclaimed themselves in public
to be women and good poets
have been reassessed: unfit as either
To be recognized by women
there are other expectations
about content, point of view
and then what — the support
of women doesn't make the same waves
and I have no proof it ever will
Would I endanger a position
garnered over forty years

Does she feel any need to

I don't know her

I know just enough about her life
to guess that a certain strength
has been accommodated off stage
as the most acceptable solution
I don't have to know all the details

I do respect diversity

a choice allowing of a different choice

What she has kept private of her
woman's life is her own business
as much as what I insist is
public of mine can be mine

Coda

because the leaves turned over
because Ralph beat back the curtain
because I have seen the air
move in the evening

I choose words
begin a poem

with this first line
finding the desired mood
the leading phrase
the way I must begin
discovering in each line
shaped successive aspects
this entire mood desired
from the beginning
chosen words accruing
to this denouement
to this accomplishment
the poem, the importance
of what happened

Not Moving

for Stephen Gordon

on a rock, established
eyes fixed on one goal
my mother is not moving
steadfast in her mother's faith
her eyes do not accept my journey here
my arduous relaxing, letting go the layers
distances, defenses and denials, rhetoric and purges
at last measuring how much I have indeed absorbed
of definitions — single equals child — and needs
— to have my place in this familial line acknowledged
to be recognized, an adult member of my tribe

my mother is not moving
she stands like a rock as I begin to tell how
from her images, her stories of the men and women of
my family I have drawn pride, inherited my strength
she claims strength only in her husband
from her lord, who, incidentally,
made heaven and earth
her eyes flash, I have no right
so to misinterpret memories

my mother is not going to move
I blurt out words I came to share
of having reconciled my life, fashioned
my place, arrived at a destination
it seems I have not arrived
a woman's place is given, and a journey
without perfect peace is merely
wandering and wasted time

set on a rock, in truth
my mother is not moving
and the history of god is on her side

(untitled)

Picasso finally is dead
in hundreds of museums
thousands of plastic plaques are finished
pictures beside them
seem to plant themselves more
confidently, solidly against the wall
they have their places now

Picasso is at last quite dead
his thought stopped
catalogued by incidences
his space is computed and defined
there will be "finds" of course
interpretations in a new light
varying regard and understanding
but his works are numbered
the definitive Picasso exhibition may begin

because Picasso is dead
personally dead as Matisse and
Gertrude Stein are
dead, his life too finally
complete, a separated thing
historical, will not intrude
his works are on their own now
they will make the papers
when they change hands

(untitled)

the gardener in autumn
in the Indian summer
in the last warm days
the mellowed days of this year
having gathered dry brown leaves
around the strawberries and roses
makes no grand decisions
while the stray cat sleeps in leaves
where early crops are over,
while bright leaves blow from the trees
and still tomatoes redden
in this last warm sun, this garden
not yet quite entirely finished,
musing, she considers
through fine aging afternoons
how peas would prosper on the east end,
where to set the separated rhubarb plants,
that the chrysanthemums are late and could,
perhaps, use extra compost, next year
gathering the marigold pods gone to seed
in drying yellows, oranges and reds,
having done all that can be done,
the gardener waits for the garden's
resolution of itself one morning
in the first hard frost

The Road Into the View

"Skyline at Dusk"

a standard picture post card
— white and red streaks flanked
by trees, a statue and a tower
lit up amid a blue of buildings —
"Philadelphia," a foreign city;
on the message side, directions
to her house "I think it's easy
but if you have trouble, call
I'll see you soon." the caption
"Looking down the Franklin Parkway
from the Washington Memorial."
does she, often, ever
when I visit there, will I

moved again
another city to slide into
sift through, prow through
and peruse
learning bus routes, train
times, parking regulations
coming upon what will come to be a
favorite building, park or street
becoming comfortable with this city's
skyline from the art museum steps
just above the trees
a reasonable scale

remembering until
without remembering
I know addresses, where
streets are, how to travel
from one to another different
ways, the same way
automatic now, this oblique left,
turning down the Parkway between
rows of trees, around the statue,
past the art museum and the
azalea garden, to the road along
the Schuylkill, home

In This Morning, In Ten Years

sleep
rising layers of sleep
floating time to wake up
sleepy last dreams stumbling into
small sounds, surfaces of
yes, morning
time to grow
deliberately
into this morning
sleep and waking
the blueness of this sky
lost and bored, what is
the use, of this largeness of
sky, un insisting beyond
even the velleities of clouds
lost and bored blue
what is the use
to grow up
to grow up to be
my age
a woman of my age
continually my age
what is the use
to wake up
in this morning to the same sky
and a different. an inevitably
different day
I have made clumsy, ignorant days
I have been bored
yes, bored with blue mornings
aching with inertia
with what is the use

to wake up and be
the woman I have learned I needed
to grow up in ten years
to be in this morning
to wake up to be
this woman and allowed
occasionally of an early morning
to lie indolently bored
beyond even daydreams
resting in this morning
this bed and this high blue sky

**Train up a child
in the way she should go
and when she is old
she will not depart from it**

Proverbs 22:6

the Puerto Rican and Italian children
set loose, scraggly in the summer
twos and threes and sixes
romp to her door
in a flowered housedress
she comes shepherding them
in the yard and parkway picking up trash
creaking carefully she stoops
to check the rose bushes for bugs
my grandmother had roses
and a bird of paradise beside the back porch steps
I swept those steps each time we visited
she showed me how short soft
strokes, nudges, keep the dust from flying.
sitting in her room upstairs
I held my mother's china-headed doll
smelling the cedar in the dress
and watched her at her dressing table
in her scents of powder and sachet
take off her hairnet and brush out her hair
she died the winter I was eight
the children clamber shyly up the porch steps
following each other to the swing
beside her rocker, swing and talk

we climbed the poles of grandma's bedstead
little monkeys chattering above her 'til she said
enough, and we slid down
beside her snuggling and comparatively still
for favorite stories of our dad
when he was six and four and three
after Sunday school
for three years after I was out of
third grade, her class, I went back
to pick up papers, put the books
in order, straighten the chairs for her
for an old woman
sat through worship services I
couldn't understand to sit beside
a woman, older
than a mother, than an aunt
a woman grandmotherly old
my grandmother was eighty when she died
offhand, I would have estimated
sixty, sixty-five
returning from the store three girls surround
her, share her shopping bag
I know the next scene
— in the kitchen, the bag on the floor
the smallest girl headfirst inside —
they ask her where each item's place
is on the pantry shelves and
quickly put it there; she sets
milk and four giant cookies on the table

an old country woman
ambushed by the host of children
that moved in next door
served root beer in her garden and tall tales
near twenty years now, letters writing
how I grow to be old
as my mother, as my aunt
old as these women have grown to be old
whose faces mingle and
mix into mine

The Rock Comes Up Out of the Ground

stone bounds both sides
of this old road, stone fences
run back between fields
the houses stand on stone
foundations set on bedrock
huge stone chimneys as end walls
the cellar floors are stone

the rock comes up out of the ground
pushed up in frost heaves
new stones every year
winds sweep the last dirt off
plows turn them over on the surface
suddenly, or hang up on large rocks
that must be dug and dragged out
set into the stone fence dividing fields

I dig rocks from the vegetable garden
to arrange among the flowers
pick up small stones by the creek bed
for my writing table, to consider
to turn over in my hands while I think

a house burns down
a worn out field is abandoned
and the stonework, overgrown
inside the canebrakes, falls
stone after stone unseen moss grows
on the fallen and the standing stones
debris and silt wash up around the canes
decaying, folding the rock back
into the ground

YALE





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