

Love in the Space of No Space

What Roads Are These?

(for Linda)

What roads are these I know so well?
You were a beauty and I was a fool
Dying each day in your lovely spell.
Come to me now in my mind's bright pool,
Tell me again what I know too well.

Bare me your hair, bare me your face,
Bear me the chance to die in your grace.
Brush me your hand, brush me your eyes,
Hush me the moment, the nevering why –
Hush me the pang, your memory's trace.

Return me the moment, its memory's death,
Return me the answer, the question, the breath.
Return me my manhood, its bright bursting power
Return me the girl, her bright blooming flower
Return me the grave and leave me the hour.

After a Dream of One I Loved at 16

(for Linda)

I want to sit and somehow write
to you, somehow comprehend
that tight swell of ache and hope
that was loving you

*you offered me your breast
with the care of a mother
and yet are the lover deepest set*

how shall I let that bright pain –
how respect its right
to come alive again?

*and be again that grace I knew
that bursting joy in me undo
and let me be in you renewed*

After So Many Years, We Talk

(for Linda)

We talk for hours, there is so much to share.
The disappointments of love.
Your eyes, brown yes but bright and deep as earth;
your red-gold hair over the curve of your shoulders;
your lips as they move – my heart keeps making little
starts.
The deep soul-sharing conversation of old friends.
Our marriages have hurt us each.
You are Catholic now, and married to a carpenter.
You have children.
And I, divorcing and childless, say very little
about where I'm going.

I confess my love for you to the dark woman
sitting nearby
who immediately turns to you and repeats
everything I said.
The dark woman laughs at me: "you do this
every year or so."

Your translucence as baffling
and intimate as it was
when I fell in love with you at 15
sharply contrasts to the obscure woman
I have married who occludes her depths from me.
Opaque and stone, what she now conceals
will be shortly revealed.
You continue to return to me over years
while she will be so utterly forgotten
that within 3 years that she will have to remind me
who she is when she calls to apologize.

Oh Linda, I want more conversations like that.
Tell me again what it was you said.
Wake me when we're done so that I can remember.

Sitting in the Car Outside the Movie

(for Kathy)

a line drawn by the streetlight
divided her face
as we talked – the top lip
in shadow; a round lip
glistening below.

a headlight caught her eye,
brown and soft,
her lips moving in the dark.

Waking Before Five

(for Sue Headlee)

waking before five
i lie alone
beneath memories
and rain
on the roof.

i measure again
the distance to Eugene;
my shoulders curve clean
against a field of sheets.

outside, little frogs
and the first cars of morning.

the rain catches
and steadies
like a breath. i lay,
an apple half-eaten
by thoughts of you.

on leaving Sue Headlee

this patched and stubble
this
 harvest moon

this broken field
under autumn's cross

these three sheaves
the silent
 gathered stalk

this Hallow's E'en

 this hunter's moon cold-fire
 darkly orange

after harvest
awaiting winter's frost

this field on the edge of night coming on
this frost-tipped field –

 this parting

A Poem to Try to Say Good-bye

(for Alyson)

I say good-bye under a white moon
like the one tonight
that is pulling tides of memory
over our heads –

We are helpless against being drawn
to this,
we who have never
said good-bye properly.

I say *good-bye* unable to comprehend
its meaning
but I say it because in two years
neither the sight of your own hands
nor the early sun on your bare arms
nor any other witness to your own being
has made you lift your face up toward mine
again as you did
in the moment before I cut you off from me.

If I have any question left, it is
how do I stop your crying
in that moment now eight years ago
so that I can go to bed tonight?

Rain-Soaked Bag

for Mary Lee

dry bits of thesis research
like pieces of beef jerky
rattle in a paper bag.
waking before 7 Sunday morning
traces of dark mingle with dawn,
grains of opacity
in the swelling light,
my room thick with their mixture.
a small rain starts up. all night
it laced the trailer off and on
like a cool hand with many fingers
while I slide around in my paper sack.
emerging from the brown paper this morning,
unexpectedly the bag is soaked
from without. it gives easily,
pulls apart as I stand up, bits
clinging to me until dissolved
by the little thoughts of you that continue
to rain down on me as they have all night.
outside the rain picks up, steadies.

How I Felt Not Seeing You All Week

(for Mary Lee)

mixed up as a marionette in a strong wind.
jumping at tugs that
before they've found their tangled way
through me have tweaked every string
making all my limbs leap.
a child's puppet left hanging caught on a bush
left knee crossed over right ear,
resolved to dangle calmly, but the next
thought of you pulls the trapdoor
at the pit of my stomach
and my feet go on their mad, comic dance
(speeded up, like old-time movies)
and I know only half the steps.

how did I feel? sliding over a pile
of feelings shifty as a bed of mice;
uneasy as a bear on ice;
if this is falling in love, I never
want to do it twice.

With “Mike” at Hog Heaven

Starts off having good times, good talks. Goes on to a mild preoccupation, bemusement. I barely recognize her behind this general sense of well-being. Goes on from there to painful falling in love with an image, or

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(are you real?)

Another fun evening with Mike at old Joe Hall's listening to Hog Heaven bluegrass and drinking 2 pitchers beer in the 2 folding chairs set left right up near the stage, the pitcher set up-down on the rough plank floor between us, laughing telling stories and opinions. I finally get her to dance and she moves surprising graceful and is scared and happy and glad she did. When I drop her off, I go up to her room and talk a couple more hours into those brown eyes.

The Lines You Make

(for Sharon)

midnight.
one o'clock.
two o'clock.
three o'clock.
four o'clock.
wide awake.
the wars within.
my black writing book
my only companion.
she lies breathing
in a bed only a few feet
away, on the other
side of the wall.
tomorrow night,
it will be 80 miles –
but the wall – that most
firm and fragile thing,
her feelings –
will be the same.
distance.

the lines the pen makes
are nothing compared with the
lines you make on my only life.

To Sharon, if She Is

the tears of the whole day
fall on my head

if I could learn your way of finding my core
a bunch of grapes in a high-school girl's mouth
who would care if I died on the floor?
judgment fades to awareness and keen thought.

discussions held with a bathroom mirror
at 2:30 a.m.

what we see when we *see*
is how we distort

You and I

(for Karen)

You take strong strokes,
sweep by rocks, astride plunging water;
jaw set,
almost fierce –
there is no recall;
your little kayak riding waist-low in the river
depends on the instantly precise decisions
of your paddle.

My strokes are longer
in the making. I dip them in a different
river,
listen –
Are they vibrated
by its passage? Do they carry its momentum?
I ask, let my words be the words of stones
rushing in the river's mouth.

Wasting My Time

(for Karen)

remembering Karen –
gray Puget Sound rainday,
coffee, wooden booths,
Athenian Cafe
in Pike Place Market
overlooking Elliot Bay –
where we were when we were,
yesterday gone away.

Seeing You After Years

(for Kerry)

to see you again last night
was like being a night-sea
that feels the weight
of a moon just now
become visible.

do I know anyone as well
as I know you
as poorly as I know you?

The Reading

(for Rhonda)

After you read,
we resisted the impulse to run
like ants and bear pieces
of the silence
bigger than ourselves
away.

Sailing past the bright harbor
of your eyes,
wrapped in a cloak of fiery
silence, wrapped
in your words,
your poems,

into a sea of cries
you heard, sea of waves
that flood,

far out, grasping for the jolting lightening
bolt your father grasped, the blue
and rain-ripped tide,
I see the tiny horizon wink into brief
brightness; your breath, this water splashing
around my hands and soul.

Why You?

(for Rhonda)

you, who as a girl leaned
into the cold crook
of a stone wall
and opening a book
flew like a hawk
high call piercing,
who knew as you stooped
to pull kneesocks up thin legs
how much higher
you would fly

Je Regrette

(for Rhonda)

A steel-gray dawn overarches
our meeting
lending comfort to the point of stillness
that rests in the moment
before decision.

I lie that moment in bed, imagining
the web of your arms
the gentle push into
your inmost, most
feminine center –
through tangles of fern
their leaves wet with mist,
into the wet, soft
earth like a root.

On the drive to Napa
cows graze off into fog;
on a wet hilltop
goldenbrown grasses hang
from the ragged hem
of mist.

Perhaps this love's best
unlived in the day-by-day;
the troubadours knew
not to remove the obstacle.

Egypt

(for Rhonda)

I dream of your Egypt
your brazen Cleopatra
eyes thieving among bronze
tombs of the Pharaohs
the phallus of a black-skinned
nubian god.

your shy hidden smile
no longer rare,
our ambiguous words
awaiting no permission
before stealing away

to depths within
you.
but, this is not to be.

on the San Francisco Artist's
Studio Tour, you saw
the grim, pain-lined face
drawn in gray charcoal
its long anguish lining
its mouth, forehead, what eyes it had –
you did not sleep well. you must
go to him
before you go to Egypt.

Aging

(for Rhonda)

As your life intersects mine
over wider spans of time,
I notice you now have the 3-forked
print of the crow at the corners
of your eyes; the lines your smile makes
stay at the corners of your mouth.
I notice your weight gains
and losses, how your clothes
fold over onto the purples and blues
and browns that lie
like a hand along your skin –
how your aging slowly draws out
the full warmth
of the graceful old woman you will become.

Accommodations

(for Rhonda)

the time approaches again when
the steel gives a weak click
and breaks, Atlas
lowers his groaning shoulders,
gives up, goes in the house.

the shadow slips from the woodblock –
the oak no longer *wants* to be carved,
the figure within, tongue
and fingers sliding into woodgrain
no longer speaks to the sculptor.

he wakes up late in the morning,
the birds fallen silent
thick, woody words slur
from his tongue into a wordless murmur
so that he stays in bed too long.

the youth, the athlete
who ran naked on the hunt
for days on end, leaping
with the dogs and stags, who shook
his locks in the hair of morning,
lies wounded in the thigh.

he tells himself, "i know
enough now to know that my love
makes nothing necessary."
and the thin arms of his black-haired lover
wither and draw back into herself.

Glass

(for Lora)

you have taken inside yourself
a frailty
like eating glass —
it nestles down inside the warm
folds of your stomach
and cuts and cuts
and is so cold.

of what use are words of confirmation
and support?
i see you warm like a fire that flares
behind a glass screen —
the fire a quick rose seen through an upturned
face, or the bottom
of an upturned glass

but when you go, your face
so white,
shoulders fragile despite
your tough, world-hardened stance —
how can I not know

the years

lived with this cold glass loving you
from within
choking the warm steam of your breath
with its glassy voice
loving itself in splinters into your
inmost places
freezing you, shattering your eyesight
in its prismatic fragmentation
of your life —
and how frail are words,
the power to help
or heal,
remorse.

Hazelnut Latte

(for Alexa)

I stir
the sweet, hot drink
that warms me through
with every sip I savor you
who taught me
the colors of love
invade and saturate
the rich
warm brown
of your skin
your hands
undressing
the taste of your
shoulders
the foam
cupped by your thin
legs

Red Ants

(for Alexa)

your kisses a trail of red ants
a slow fire
at first just a few
at the corners of my mouth
a small flame licking momentarily
across the floor of the room
where the house fire will explode
suddenly
crawling with ants
biting, aflame
the body swollen and swarming
bursting
scattering fire ants
into you, into me, across the room
scattered stars.

Tiger Lilies

(for Maliah)

falling in love is an addiction too –
even God is addicted –
tiger lilies quiver under rain
drops collect by teeth
lining the thin edges of the curved
serrated tropical leaf blades

July monsoon
the ecstasy dizzying
floating between God and death
thick stands of tiger-colored
lilies.

The Tigress

(for Maliah)

you are the tigress
you hunt without mercy
you burn the soles of my heart
you do not let me sleep
your passion devours me
even your name says tigress
I save your emails to read again
I dial my office late at night
to hear your voice again
only very late the prey freezes
sensing it is already much too late

Love in the Space of No Space

(for Maliah)

I. Coming to You

coming to your room late at night, I discern you,
dark from the dark,
only by the faint haze that rises from your skin,
the glow hovering above a stream
that falls continuously from the undiscovered mother lode.
drifting down night's swift-dropping stream I slip silently
stone by stone
down its murmuring throat to wash ashore
on your lapping breath, the warm haze of your skin.

who would dare say of your skin its color?
ebony, raven, coal, ink, pitch, jet –
deep blueblack deepening to purpleblack in places
where nights stilled to dreamless sleep have left it
undisturbed time uncounted;
but lit by flecks of gold that themselves gather
and burst into sands, into beaches where,
free from care, there is no other day;
and bits are rosy-tinged, edging into self-luminescence
there, where you are most sensitive;
browns that wrap themselves in arms, pale pinks
of palms that shade indistinctly into morning auras
lit by all your colors –

all this I see and don't see, entering
your darkened room. your breath
slowly floods the room,
slowly recedes.
swimming in it, my strokes carry me
with barely a ripple toward
your breasts that barely move as you sleep,
your life moving in and out of you
like a mist that almost escapes, almost
enters the glow rising from your skin
and rises to God, but just then it laughs
and casts off – is drawn back within you.
the smell of your breath, earthen,
leaning over you,
you take in my breath, give me yours
and with so much of you inside me now

rushing up every capillary
I am helpless flotsam, driftwood in the stream
of your breath.

your eyes surface only a moment, smile
– it is not their color,
but their spaciousness, not how they shine,
but the tangible force that shining
from them I feel in my face like a final word
heard over me like a breath of air.

your eyes,
falling for miles,
falling that is no longer falling,
falling the way the earth does,
around itself, as the gull does
sailing out over an ocean it will never cross.

your lips – I did not know
how was I to know
I had no idea
that your lips would be soft
as two pillows between which slipped my life
in the briefest of moments
melting suddenly
so that I no longer knew myself,
soft suddenly myself
in your mouth.

your tongue like stepping into a hot shower
my skin suddenly pulls back from my body
and rushes forward
just as there is on the roof a silence
after nightlong rain
so my skin reverberates with what is not there
after the thousand darts of your tongue,
my pulse on your tongue
only moments before.

coming to your place of bees and hummingbirds
your valley thrumming with their movement
like the purr in a cat's throat
or the vibration in a speaker
electrical, wet and warm

your nipples rise to meet me, twin shouts of joy
leap from peak to peak
and swell into a valley resounding.
I push through the valley ferns and leaves
so slowly, poking my head through just a little

to look around in you, then withdrawing again.
I slip into you so slowly
that at first you are not certain I am there.
the long train slides into the station late at night,
it seems to take a long, long time –
the engineer, crazed, reverses and withdraws
just as slowly, then reverses again
and again and again
then suddenly slams forward
to the bumper that marks the end of the track.
No one left on the platform but you,
your eyes widen
you would like this train to come to you
over and over forever and never
come to rest.

I take your head in my hands,
I brush back your hair from your forehead, my hand
merges with your head.
I breathe your breath filling my lungs with the emanation
and fragrance of your living, the breath
moves back and forth between us.
Joined at our root, roots so mingled
there is but one plant that has so many forms.
From the root a zipper moves slowly up,
joining us, painful joy that, when it reaches
our hearts makes us gasp, grasping for one another,
as your heart moves in mine, mine in you.

In your hair swims the universe
and in your eyes, which are my eyes,
is the outlook from which God watches.
You look into me as I look into you
and what opens out is an expanse
in which you and I are not two,
not simply one, two limbs of one being,
two waves of one water, two cries
of love that mingle and whose boundaries are unheard,
two hands that have held each other so long
that they grasp as the left does the right,
two souls who rise like two notes of two instruments
whose entire being is given over to the same song,
two who merge and stay themselves,
root, heart, breath, eyes, hands, souls
weeping for the great relief of joining with
what we already are, having found
again what we always were.

II. Recuperating

love
in a space so narrow
so unrestricted
it vanishes
over and over
and never
disappears.

love,
cyberspace
escapes from nothing
into nothing
having had an illusion

of having had an illusion
misery false
even to itself

love,
after illness
long convalescence
weak sun
a little tea
sitting quietly.