

What Rises and What Stays

(for Jennifer)

Dancer Who Stays in My Arms

you are the one who stays
in my arms
after the dance is ended.
even when you are not there,
you are there.
even if we dance just the one,
we will know each other
that well –
like a stone dropped in a deep well
long after its ripples
have spread away
sinking
its weight
pulls toward the depth.
so you will be in me,
i in you.

Jennifer at Two

that bright eager energy
of a child, her arms up
her hands almost taking the hand
of the air itself,
her round eyes dark-circled
beneath, turned up already
to the lover in the arms
of the world
whom she welcomes
with a child's joy
a child's trust,
a child's unconcern.

Parting (for Jennifer)

the moments of parting swirl
like wine in the glass –
vanishing.

our heads thicken
with the darting moments –
a spawn of tight silvered bodies
fight upstream to the eye's sill.

drain the wine of parting
oh my love –
now remorseless time
begins to work for us,
each moment
bringing us closer.

Instructions for Jennifer

from now on, whenever you are
photographed
you must look into the camera
as if I am gazing into your eyes
from a hotel room alone
on the other side of the world,
an ocean of distance
flown suddenly
by the two birds of your eyes
that reach mine.

Be a Box

Be a box you alone can open –
contents all kept to yourself
on afternoons of slanting light
no one home
but the two of you.

Thou

we have spoken the primal word
to each other,
you have become mysterious,
boundless, star-scattered
wrapping me in your femininity like scarfs
of northern lights, and I for you
perhaps a pillar of fire by night
and a pillar of cloud by day
pushing aside skies
and raining into your earth
fertilizing and fertilized

Saturday Morning Poem

the armies of rain have marched their many boots
across the roof.
the steady rain soaks in and mutes
and is at last enough.
the bedside clock turns on the radio
to Bach, we lie and listen – his notes go
mingling with the rain
and bring back consciousness from roots
where it had lain

plunged by love to depths in which it turns
in arms of rain.
the rising rain returning unrestrained relearns
the showering refrain
as when a vine, cut back, regains its hold –
a story that the music's intertwining told.
the heavy-footed dance goes on across the roof,
a quickening advance until it's had enough
and drops again

then I release your breast and we prepare to stand;
the curl of warmth unwinds from tangled legs and hands.
the cross-blown rain goes chasing quick
across the roof;
the moments of love sum up their arithmetic
and are at last enough.

Sunday Night Poem

the great sea of breath finally quiets,
my heart pressed to yours.
this is why I want to live near the ocean –
to hear that sound, night-long.

seaweed mistress entangling
and pungent, mermaid emerging,
tailprint on beach sand huge
beyond imagining, boats lunging
far out to sea, beyond care
salt surging, words strangling
on the last-grasped air,
earth enduring, stars burning out.

the downstairs clock's strike muffled
like a foghorn as we fall back
into that sea.

As Our Wedding Approaches

coming home, over the Pacific

the beauty of dawn lies in its fleeting –
the fresh, young promise
brightening to womanhood.

the beauty of summer lies in its ripening –
the limbs we thought could go on bearing
ah, so generously dropping their fruit.

the beauty of age lies in its passing –
the dark night of early spring filtered
by young light; fresh breath of dawn.

The Anima Leaves the Alter

Wedding invitations go out, the anima departs;
something new begins. I search her out –
the long-drawn cries, the wind fading and rising –
pursuing her through other women, a desperate
wrongheaded fidelity. Mysterious moonlit water carrier
who barely reveals herself, deep shadow on night
beaches by the crashing sea of the unconscious
that nightlong pounds the soul's shore – she
with whom I was united as I was born, who
I may find for an evening in any woman.
To bring this mysterious creature to fall in love with me
is intoxicating as spring wysteria.
But it is not her about whom I care –
it's my own soul, and you.
Tonight's moon maiden carries water
for me this time, her tidal pull undeniable –
mysteriously separated; irresistibly pulled. And because
contact with any woman's body carries her thrills,
and because my Peter Pan fairylike mother-nourished
feminine sympathy fatally attracts women
to be my water carriers, her own midnight-blooming tree
must wither as our marriage approaches.

I commit to husbanding
a different orchard; a new fragrance intimately
steady, more firm, less lingering. Mother and father ourselves,
we mother and father ourselves,
center now to a different half of life. No longer
communing with a missing half, but halves joining in procreation,
prayers that father birth and protection.
White light, help us be true, keep us safe.
Even so, I load myself with debts and possessions
to keep contact with this world –
an anchor dragging the earth. For if
anima does not reconcile with young wife
and mother, creative soul with family, home,
community, and the material world, then She
will continue to send strange and exciting messages.
Mothering-fathering our son, the water breaks,
the loved soul swims to the lived surface,
and what the water-carrier carries in the dark,
lifts from inner sea to light, breaking the mother's sea,
opening the gaping matrix as the head emerges – and She
pours sparkling water over my head,
flowing clear, sunlit – all the love my soul belongs and owes.

Falling in Love for a Lifetime

that your life intersected mine
(then, there)
is as much who you are (how you –
that pink dress) (long brown hair) (gentle)
as who I am (leaping male dancer,
stamping) (smiling eyes) –
fate in our bodies,
trajectories, particle tracks that phosphoresce
the plate (watchful) (universe).
Not less the collision
of automobiles that, but for a matter of
seconds (opposite ways) (unimportant).
No – we (brief) burst
(pulse) (dance) puzzle
astronomers on the other
side of the galaxy (non-locality).
Love – this is not (personal
taste) (self-contained)
we are (path) (conjunction) (time
afoot) and our falling in love –
if you want the truth –
is in truth falling. You were
what my life asked of me – yes,
it was me and you
to be *there, then* and thus
– falling in love
(inextricable) (joy of matter)
(shape of a life
time) – intersection of being
with itself.

Birth Canal

swimming upstream against the tide
of your eyes
in a room flooded by moonlight
the river that sparkles
out of your eyes,
the soft stream of your voice
telling me quietly
that I am loved.

After Two Children

like a giant fig
split open on the ground,
a huge melon rind
hollowed and left,
your body lying next to mine –
yearning softness and
a hardness that longs
only to be soft again,
aching overripe
all the fruit of summer eaten
or spoiling on the ground.

Earth Air Fire Water

you, breath of life
your love-making breathes into me –
so now I say let's say
goodbye?

the earth had dried to a hard
light tan around the roots –
am I ready to let this
die?

your fire sweeps, hot breath
over scorching ground
under its consuming hand, what
cry?

Return Over Two Ridges

a letter to my wife

returning – coming down
these wet stone fields
most of seven years.

brushing your hair
a mist from my face,
almost convinced
I'm not alone.

ridiculous to worry –
what might be lost
in these hills. cloud-hidden,
then not.

slow as I go,
I miss more than I see –
when I can see at all

tree-rent mist –
I know only the one path.

– how often, your
bare shoulder

when all this time
this way, these hills

wrapped and unwrapped

Sandals

These sandals, insoles
polished brown and shaped
by the soles of both our feet
(as we wear the same size
and never think which pair
we're putting on)
wait by the door where they were left
to carry me or you – whoever
needs them next – ensouled
through the infinite small steps
of our marriage.

The Ruined Fruit

her breasts are larger now
the belly, the bottom
all sag with heavy fruit,
warm, rich, odorous
and the breath of memory
lingers like a spice on her mouth
 – that warm animal
burrowed in our bed.
her thoughts like bedclothes
body-warmed she drifts
between sleep and wake,
her nearness like a fruit
ruined, overripe
the sweet taste
leaks out and the ground
takes it up, makes soil.

On Your 50th Birthday

You told me how, as a girl
you avoided stepping on grass
because it is alive,
and when your
sister pulled you onto the lawn,
you were furious.

I have always known
that you, like the unicorn, are too good
to be widely known. I have only just
found that a unicorn
has been bedded down
in our garden – how long?
These many years.

The Elephant Escaping into the Future

I made a mess of it, I suppose, we both
made a mess of it –
blundering our vague way toward an urgent
future, dimly supposed (like a Cézanne landscape)
to correspond to one more deeply understood
if not quite articulate – horrifying
friends and family, appalled at the trampling
like elephants let loose among ceramics –
squinting small eyes
at an ineradicable memory of the future
(sometimes you scarcely realize what your own future
knows so well, that all the elbowing
wallowing, lurching, wildly trumpeting fear
that we might miss it, might fail to live it
becomes justified when shaking the fraying ropes
from our rough hide,
we escape), come restfully to bump
up on the bank of this slowly
flowing backwater, these decades later, together
looking back.

What Rises and What Stays

you are soul to my spirit
ground to my air
heart to my leap;
ordinary detail that fills in
my life's quick sketch
and extraordinary stroke
that fulfills it;
step to my dance
and dance materializing
from footsteps from which I run on;
love to my love
calm to my trouble
hurt I may heal
and healing for my hurt;
what you know –
fate to my break –
you have your own reasons
and you live in them.
morning sun
to my early departure
strength to my speed
peace to my vision
each of us half to our whole;
the smell of clean air
cleansing of fresh water
water soaking black earth
earth over which fire plays
fire of my beloved,
soulmate.