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## Katharine's Dream

Karen Maceira  
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KATHARINE'S DREAM

by

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B.A. June 1970, University of New Orleans

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of  
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Approved by:

Janet Sylvester (Director)

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## ABSTRACT

### KATHARINE'S DREAM

Karen Maceira  
Old Dominion University, 1993  
Director: Dr. Janet Sylvester

Katharine's Dream is about a girl born into a family of great passion and great fear. Not all members of the family survive this devastating combination. These poems tell of who survived and how, and of who did not.

The poems are predominantly free verse lyrics which use standard diction and syntax. More often than not, they employ a short line, dense imagery and "white space," which frames the images and ideas, in the words of Mary Oliver, with the necessary "silence." Though the rhythms of some of the poems flow along smoothly, line breaks in others often suggest the hesitation of one coping with an inner ambivalence.

The manuscript is divided into two parts. The first, "The Twilight Fishermen," deals with Katharine's life when young. The second part, "Desire," tells of her experiences as she gets older.

for José  
and for Ronnie

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Some of the poems in this manuscript have appeared or will appear soon in these journals: *James River Review*: "At the Library," "What She Wanted," "The Widows Support Group Goes on an Outing"; *Negative Capability*: "Days Off," "Sestina From the Other Side of Town"; *Scrivener*: "Mother and Father Pose Next to the '54 Plymouth."

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# Katharine's Dream

.



## **The Twilight Fishermen**

## Days Off

On my mother's days off I rushed home from school,  
up the three concrete steps, across the porch  
and flung the door open to what I knew waited  
on our side of the shotgun double--

first the smell of pine oil, sharp on the narrow  
floor boards, then the sweet smell of fresh  
ironing hanging in every doorway,  
and best of all, in the cool darkness

of the icebox, little Pyrex ramekins of pudding,  
each neatly half chocolate, half vanilla.  
Mama stood at her ironing, listening to the radio  
near the window fan that rattled and bathed us in warm air.

On Sundays we visited Mama's older sister Irene  
around the corner on St. Maurice. We went up  
the long flight of wooden stairs into her wide rooms  
past the crystal chandelier in the living room

to the kitchen where she served us  
triangles of buttered toast and chicory coffee  
full of hot milk and sugar.  
I always wandered to the chandelier,

its faceted glass cylinders each telling  
the light a different way to go.  
If it were a Sunday when Dad was off,  
we rode to Aunt Margie's, Mama's younger sister.

She lived in Gentilly and grew daisies  
along the walk to the porch.  
Her second husband, Uncle Jimmy, laughed  
a lot from beer and pulled out everything to eat.

She laughed without beer and served thick slices  
of layer cake with strawberry jam in the middle.  
The last time we were all together, before  
Margie's aneurysm burst, before Irene sat up

in her hospital bed, her soft white hair wild, and saw God,  
the chandelier lost a crystal. I kept it safe  
in my palm as we sat around the table  
filled with coffee cups and remnants of toast.

In the late afternoon light,  
Aunt Margie told one of our favorite stories--  
the story of May Devotions,  
when she and Aunt Irene and Mama pretended

night after spring night to be in church,  
while really playing Hunt-the-Hay with cousins  
in the balmy darkness. Aunt Margie's voice  
was innocent, "Yes, Papa, we're going to church again."

When in the story the truth was out  
and their Papa took the switch to them,  
all of us--adults and children--filled the darkening  
kitchen with laughter until tears came.

It was then, with the cut glass warm  
in my hand, I felt their calm grow inside me,  
a calm I still carry, knowing it means  
nothing will be the same.

*for Esther, Irene and Margie*

Safe

Our dog, the one who was a puppy  
    when Daddy surprised us with him,  
the one who chased us,  
    screaming with delight,  
around the banana-tree yard,  
    that one ran out  
of our luckless, open gate.

The day Mama told us,  
    two small children  
bathing together, we knew

how death blows its huge  
    iridescent bubble  
bigger, way bigger  
    than the earth

and that we're all safe  
    inside the bubble of death.

(stanza break)

We often stroked  
the taut, inside wall  
making the blue-gold-red  
vibrate around us.

Holding hands, leaning  
back, a trick  
to plant trees in the clouds,

we caught, one day,  
the faint, luminous  
sheen of the far wall

stretching away, beyond  
where we could ever see.

## Mother and Father Pose Next to the '54 Plymouth

His arm's around her.

They are squinting and smiling,  
standing in a small triangle of light.

The car's smooth lines bend away  
from the curve of his broad shoulder.

His hand clasps her upper arm,  
his head tilting toward her.

She's upright, both hands together  
in front of her. Even so,  
there is no sign of the dusty  
yard, the steel gate of the prison.

No sign of the bleeding  
wrists, the garishly lit  
emergency room. No  
sign of the bodybag  
lifted that early December  
morning from the bank  
of Stump Lagoon.

It would take fifteen,  
twenty, thirty years before  
they knew their own silence  
driving up to that gate  
opened to their firstborn son (no stanza break)  
after years of being locked away;

before they knew how patiently  
she would help her daughter  
lower her drawers to use the toilet  
until the wrists healed;  
before her body simply  
shook uncontrollably at the sight  
of her lastborn in a coffin,  
victim of himself.

The green Plymouth gleams  
next to them. There is no  
sign of the succession of other  
cars they would own, just this  
one, sharing the light  
that falls through the alley  
between two narrow houses,  
just other people's cars  
on the street behind them.



## Memory with Banana Trees in the Background

I ride your shoulders,  
    dips and strides effortless as my breathing.  
You laugh, jaunty as you were

    that long ago afternoon Mama fell in love with you,  
a handsome Marine, tall in dress whites.

Leaning toward friends who smile from their car,  
    you hold out the cue:  
        *And when are you a good girl?*

Floating over the ditch  
    in front of the house

I give back the answer,  
    this sweet catechism, unbidden

as the honeysuckle softening  
    the fence across the yard:  
        *When I'm sleeping.*

## The Six on the Clock

Six  
on the clock  
in school years  
ago,

I wrote a poem  
of love to you,  
but friends said  
you must  
stand  
for something,

and the poem  
is better  
if the poet  
knows.

Oh, Six,  
if your dark  
inward  
curl  
is the dark  
place on my  
body

(no stanza break)

where he  
loves me,

then that's why  
I love you.  
If your thin  
back  
is the gossamer  
wall of the giant  
soap bubble,  
iridescent in the light  
held in the huge hoop  
by the amazed  
autistic  
child,

then I love you  
for that.  
If your round  
belly  
is the belly  
of all love  
sitting like  
a buddha  
whose hand  
waves to me,  
no wonder

(no stanza break)

I have adored  
you all  
these  
years.

Where you sit  
in my memory,  
high on the wall,  
safe from green  
boisterous  
boys, you bend  
with the sleek  
black  
beauty  
and clear emptiness  
of my  
dreams.

## Catechism

Smooth gray arches led from the rain  
on Sundays into incense and the shudder  
of wax burning deep in red glass.  
When the rain stopped sunrays refracted  
colored light through glass saints  
on all sides. I sat with Mother, left  
with her out through the arches,  
down the steps, one of many dark  
umbrellas floating homeward  
under dripping trees.

On Thursdays I returned alone.  
The schoolteacher's hand  
signalled time to leave early,  
time to go down the bright, dusty stairwell,  
down St. Claude, then St. Maurice  
almost to the river,  
snapping flat the black berries  
under my shoes from nameless  
trees shading me all the way.

In the crowded churchyard  
nameless merry-go-round children spun,  
children from other public schools, (no stanza break)

leaping, grabbing the bars  
at just the right moment,  
screaming on the weathered wooden seat.  
My legs on the bench  
would not unbend to stand or leap.  
I closed my eyes, concentrating,

and came upon the familiar musty  
smell of Father's black cassock.  
Looking up, I saw his bare hand  
appear from the sleeve,  
holding the handbell,  
its bobbed metal tongue dumbly  
announcing time to line up,  
to go inside the arches, repeating prayers,  
singing *Lord of all we bow before Thee*,  
rehearsing the Bishop's answers  
to the Bishop's questions.

In the pew before mine  
an afternoon ray shot red  
through a boy's blond hair.

I felt my legs unbend.

(no stanza break)

I stood and in my high  
child's voice asked why  
the merry-go-round  
(everyone stopped reciting)  
spun so fast. Why  
they, my brothers, never  
thought of slowing, why I  
had a name.

Everyone resumed reciting.  
I lost the answers.  
I tried to find them  
every time I walked to catechism  
in each purple stain on the sidewalk  
left by the firm hackberries  
under my feet.

## The Ship

The child, alone  
with Grandpa, feels his hand

creep beneath her clothes.  
She is numb and quiet.

She is so quiet the city  
fills with the silence.

Stars float high  
over the Mississippi

and a ship she has seen  
from the levee

with strange letters on its bow  
slips soundlessly

through the mouth of the river  
into the wide, wide Gulf.



## Shadowchild

One  
who lingers  
in the schoolyard

observing light  
fade  
from leaves  
of the huge oak

one who nods  
at empty swings  
and soothes

the sandy soil  
barren of busy hands  
and feet

one who learns  
of the unreal  
body

(stanza break)

in lessons  
numerous  
as stars piercing  
twilight

one  
whose memory  
is unfailing

awaits  
the constellation  
which leads

out of the dark  
schoolyard  
night.

## Katharine at the Bookmobile

We form a queue under the oaks  
in front of the school.

The bookmobile rolls in,  
becomes the head of a tranced

sperm, restless sixth graders  
its quietly waving tail.

I hold my books to my scrawny chest.  
This year I first loved a boy,

wordlessly and from a distance  
except for the day he stopped  
at my desk with his project, the lima beans  
neatly split and taped, tiny white fingers

of the embryo plants held against  
the cellophane, thick black arrows pointing.  
The line is moving. I'll be next  
to step up into the warm dimness,

the narrow aisle crowded  
on both sides with books,  
the familiar, enveloping odor  
of paper and ink and glue. (stanza break)

I know my shelves, the fat  
fairytale books in every color--  
and the shelf of thin, blue-bound  
biographies of resolute

women: Amelia Earhart, Jane Addams,  
the fairytale I determine my life  
will become--goodness sharp,  
stinging as their dark

profiles on the pages.  
I center on this thought, alert  
to the membrane resisting me.  
I try the circumference,

the different angles of approach  
wondering what it feels like  
to kiss a boy, what it's like  
to be beautiful and brave.

## The Flowers of Hawaii

Getting ready for school,

    I fixed in my hair

the red-flowered headband

    I was convinced

made me look exotically

    Hawaiian. From my bedroom

next to the kitchen, I saw my father,

    carrying the newspaper,

walk in from the nightshift at the fire station.

    I heard my mother's gasp,

then the sound of her sobs.

    I ran to the table

where he leaned silently

    over her, where Ronnie sat,

his spoon in midair.

    I peered at the article

that told of my older brother's arrest

(stanza break)

when desperate for drugs,  
    he'd broken into a pharmacy.  
I stared at our last name  
    in the headline. Wouldn't everyone  
at the junior high know? *Do I have*  
    *to go today, Mama?* She nodded.

All day my cheeks burned.  
    All day I felt the hug of the headband.

## Spring

It's April,  
time for the curtains to billow  
on the clothesline, time

for the blinds to soak clean  
in the tub, time for you,  
Mama, to stand outside

on the ladder, me inside,  
rags in our hands dancing  
in swirls across the panes

until we swear there is no  
glass, nothing between us.  
It's April.

I don't realize that the ache  
I can only feel in my throat  
is wanting your hands on my face, your face

like a rose scudding,  
blooming away from me.  
It's April

the night I sit with a boyfriend  
on the red, nubby sofa  
in our living room and let him

touch me where I shouldn't,  
my brother spying, witness  
to the naked blush on my face.

"You're not my sister!"  
Sister now awash  
in the cry that brings

my father to stand over me,  
the boy sent away,  
father grim at the green

marbled formica kitchen table,  
me staring at the specks of rust  
on the table's bent, chromed legs.

Then you look at me  
across the room and the glass  
between us shimmers

into clean, silver rain.  
And it's April.  
You are holding me,



Mama, your arms like the petals  
of a fragrant cloud,  
your hands telling me,

clean and good,  
I am your child.

## Sestina From the Other Side of Town

She holds the strap, swaying as the streetcar  
rocks along its tracks. A family  
of strangers assembles out of the chill autumn  
twilight, quiescently dissolves  
back into darkness and weariless rain  
whenever the conductor stops and opens the door.

Of all the faces crowding through the door  
only she, she thinks, will never leave this streetcar,  
its yellow lights warm and safe from rain,  
the peaceful reading of the evening news, a family  
never laughing, never arguing, dissolving  
words like color in leaves in autumn.

She's on an errand uptown this autumn  
night. This ride becomes a door  
she chooses to open, the dissolving  
of a wall in the warmth of the streetcar,  
letting fear--she won't think of her family--  
flow out into the cool, starless rain.

She's fifteen and sees, through rain,  
a girl she wants to be: smooth-haired, with an autumn  
date for the Tulane game, a girl whose family  
lives somewhere near on St. Charles, whose door (no stanza break)

opens into the yellow warmth of this streetcar,  
only not of strangers dissolving,

leaving her the need to dissolve  
herself, to take a different shape like rain  
or the face that never leaves the streetcar,  
escaping the chill shuffle of leaves in autumn,  
the empty faces of closed doors,  
the terrifying fathers and mothers of families.

The car reaches Canal Street. Across the avenue her family  
assembles in her mind, dissolving  
the seats, walls, the door  
she has first opened in the rain  
of this late autumn.  
She walks through the flapping wood and glass of the streetcar,

back toward her family through rain,  
holding the dissolving dream of the autumn  
night, the door to the trembling warmth of the streetcar.

## The Face of the Child

Moving cross country, at dusk I drove through a city,  
through autumn rain down endless lanes of houses,  
through streets strangely dark and empty,  
through homesickness such an evening arouses.

In each house in each lane shone a light  
like a lantern hung and waiting for a guest  
or a fire to warm the cool night  
or a million yellow stars come to rest.

In each window shadowy figures stirred  
in a silent dance learned long ago  
and the rain pattered as if it deferred  
the din of its passion for the quiet tableau.

And like a stray moon, with curtains hung about,  
one face, chin windowsill high, looked out.

For My Brother

You your whole life to me bright  
as Venus, beauty  
in the small conch  
of your ear, the wispy  
tendrils at your nape.

Through the waters of your sky  
you trembled  
until breath  
settled deeply  
its yearning.

Then your perfectly formed ear floated  
into my palm.  
Now, each day,  
I hold it up  
to hear the sea.

\*

*The man's body was found  
by two fishermen on the shore  
of Stump Lagoon.*

\*

One Christmas when we were children  
we decorated the tree by ourselves.

We sang, the two of us,  
as we took the small tree

out of its darkness  
and made it shine.

\*

*The sherrif retrieved the bone-  
handled fishing knife .*

\*

Outside in the dark schoolyard  
some vigilant part of me  
once waited for years

rather than go home to our family.  
Under the oak I was the shadow  
nourished on starlight.

Now I keep this vigil  
at the shore of the lagoon  
where I can see the water ripple,

the reeds darken at dusk,  
as you must have seen them  
that cool autumn evening.

Your face always before me,  
I listen for  
that last song.

\*

*The skiff was found half-  
sunken nearby.*

\*

In the days we played together  
at the shallow end,  
  
near the beach amusement park,  
where the Zephyr rose

a white, cross-hatched mountain  
above palm trees,

the lake was clear to the bottom.

We stood chest deep,

watching our bodies  
waver in the filtered light.

\*

*"The man bled from a self-  
inflicted laceration  
to the pericardial sac."*

\*

When we were nine and ten,  
you returned from a long stay at Uncle's.  
We flew into each other's arms,  
without thinking.

\*

*"It was a very slow death."*



\*

Tonight the moon at its perigee  
    presses its light, like new-molten alloy, to the earth,  
light that could cast us all in some bright knowledge  
    just found and translated, light released gently upon us  
now that the sky is dark and you lie cold,  
    only your songs warm where I hold them.

Can't I love an earth so recently blessed?  
    Can't I imagine the incandescence will last?  
Can't I go forward in this new brilliant body?

## The Twilight Fishermen: Assaying the Catch

I was a child those early evenings we walked  
the seawall. The lake, clear to the bottom,  
wavered out to where we could not see.  
My eyes were on you, the man I followed,  
my tall, square-shouldered father, jocund,  
calling to the twilight fishermen, gathered in families:

Men hunkered over cast nets, grasped the perimeters  
in nimble fingers and between teeth, gathered  
the nets to themselves, then thrust  
them into the water  
like sudden and compelling webs.

Women checked the crab nets or bent  
over the picnic supper, looking up to trace  
the paths of their children scampering up and down  
the seawall steps. They glanced up to smile  
and answer my father's questions.

Near them, water lapped the bottom steps,  
gently stroking the bright green algae;  
its short, silky nap leaning  
with the water, back and forth--  
its movement right.

(stanza break)

Now I see how I always watched  
from the highest step, dry, far from transparent  
carcasses of crab and shrimp. My body held  
to that narrow ledge between land  
and water, between the tide  
and sea of warm grass, until the night

years later when I lay on the cot in the bright  
hallway of Charity Hospital, blood-soaked  
towels binding my wrists, the night you turned  
and looked at me. Then, neither of us  
had words, the words I can almost  
call to you now:

*Come fish with me from the seawall.*  
*It is twilight. My net is ready.*

## **Desire**

Katharine at the Shrink's

I read in the paper  
about a man who went in search of the blue damselfly.  
Sitting at the kitchen table  
an awareness came over me.

I saw my own back and shoulders,  
the side of my face, the peach-  
flowered wallpaper all blurred  
in the background.

A few days later I sat eating toast,  
watching the herons and ducks on the pond  
when I heard a single  
bar of music.

I knew what it was.  
My being had its own melody.  
I couldn't tell you what it sounded like  
but I haven't been the same since.

I've been dreaming about damselflies  
fluttering thin and blue in the trees.  
Maybe I'm really going crazy now.  
Maybe that accident shook

my brains too hard.

Or maybe there is some kind  
of humming of the atoms for us, too,  
not just the planets way out there.

If there *is* music to each of us  
it's past atoms, into the spirit, I mean.  
When Jena died right next  
to me in that car, I never knew

until I woke up in the hospital  
and they told me. When they left  
her spirit came to say goodbye.  
It was clear, not weird or anything.

She was my best friend  
and wouldn't leave without that.  
But I don't trust myself about the music.  
After I took those amphetamines and made

those fine slices in my wrists,  
I lay awake that whole night hallucinating  
that someone knocked at the door.  
I kept saying *Come in, come in,*

all the while explaining something  
to no one there beside me.  
I wish I knew  
what I explained all that night.

What's it like to trust  
what you feel deep down?  
Maybe like sleeping with God,  
like feeling the coolest,

smoothest skin next to yours  
thoughts could just pass right through?  
Well, that's not for me.  
What *do* I trust? Good

question. I think I'm starting  
to trust you. You're smiling  
and your face is all soft and nice.  
It makes me feel like I do

in those damselfly dreams. But the music--  
this music's important. It could mean God  
does exist. Or there's something holding me  
together, something that makes sense.

## What She Wanted

When her grandpa, with his whiskey breath,  
lay in her bed,

what she wanted  
she told to the white  
chenille spread she clutched,  
her fingers alive  
for all the rest of her,

so his big, rough  
hands touched only the pale  
folds between her small  
thighs and couldn't reach  
into her ribcage and lift  
out the rich orchid  
of her heart.

What she wanted,  
years later, the man she loved  
over her, was his shadow free  
of that looming mountain.

(stanza break)



She wanted  
her hands to rise  
to his face,  
and then to all of him,  
an island  
where a deep  
orchid blooms  
and dies  
and blooms again.

## How Our Son Came to be Born

We made love every other night  
to keep the sperm count up  
and I never moved right after  
but kept my hips tilted  
toward the ceiling.

Then we took lessons in Lamaze  
but forgot every one when labor came;  
his back, he complained,  
was killing him  
and when I motioned  
in the middle of my breathing,  
for him to bend closer for a kiss  
he thought I meant count louder.

"It's a boy!"  
said the big blue button he wore,  
grinning,  
doctor's cap askew,  
out of delivery

while I lay in recovery  
dazed by the pain my body had taken in  
and by the love that came  
to sit beside it.

## My Son the Tiny Savior

my son was born

a tiny savior

this I knew the whole

time my uterus wrenched

him out of me

that large nurse

pressing down

I thought I was dying

when they brought him

he choked I rang the bell

for them to come get him

this strange small savior

but then he nursed eagerly

his red skin smoothed out

his dark hair lay downy

over his head uneven

where he'd rounded the curve  
toward the light

face up he was that  
hungry for it

I held him and wept  
I was no longer afraid

all the days he  
transformed before me

letting go of my nipple  
to smile up at me

that first time his eyes  
erasing my doubt

his eyes telling me people are  
born for the good

and I remembered  
how he'd made me promise

as he squirmed free  
still tethered to my body

that I too would keep  
my hold on the earth

as long as I possibly could  
*even if we*

*quarrel!* he yelled blue  
in the face a moment

*promise! promise!*  
and I felt the pull

until it became the new natural  
substance spread

over my life this child  
teaching me love

## At the Library

The man in line ahead of her  
didn't know the curve of his cheek  
caught her the same way  
her husband's had as she knelt  
before his coffin, memorizing.

She discovered  
from photographs of decomposing  
bodies in a book  
that muscle forgets first.  
Skin clings until it loses  
consciousness.  
Then teeth and bones,  
closest to stone.

She reached up to touch his cheek.  
He turned, eyes open, looking  
past her with no expression.  
She remembered where she was  
and dropped her hand.

Letter to Jose´

“You and I are not snobs. We can never  
be born enough.” e. e. cummings

It has taken a long time to place the bones  
safe and dry  
in their box. “Here lies Jose´,” I can say now,  
practicing  
a new simplicity you would admire.  
And speaking of essences, yours I still  
steal and keep,  
my good luck charm against life  
and death.  
As your wife and one who loved you  
after all,  
I am entitled--your generosity always taught me  
welcome.

I think of the things I put in the coffin  
with your body  
in the manner of those who buried  
their dead  
with what they would need  
in the other world.  
Only I knew it was this world, these things  
that needed you:

Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, a bag of Darjeeling, (no stanza break)

a letter  
from me quoting cummings, a baseball, writing paper,  
your pen.

I have felt the required guilt at going on  
living,  
at going on "never being born enough,"  
never weeping enough  
to water the seeds of a new year, but my good  
luck charm  
is working now, my love. The season  
turns.

Your bones are dry and safe near  
the crape myrtle  
while I drift in the fragrant marsh  
of spring.



## The Widows' Support Group Goes on an Outing

Before the play, softly  
they talk of flashing October.  
They'll climb the mountain  
and enjoy the view.  
Between acts they lightly reminisce.  
Smiling, they clap at the curtain.

Tears, the next day.  
The pulse, a flicker  
in the belly just at the navel.  
Memory's the surprising  
leap in the dark meadow  
when the hero's lips parted.

Their bodies keep  
these expensive ways  
though they would relinquish them

in case there is a city  
where husbands gather  
all on one side  
like clouds at sunset  
deepening.

To My Son

I'll remember you this way:

the 14-year-old boy

who shined his father's shoes

so we could bring the clothes

to the funeral parlor,

not knowing the shoes

wouldn't be wanted,

his legs under

the white drape in the coffin.

You stood there

holding your father's

shined shoes,

one small gesture

he had already

stopped needing.

Desire

1

I stand below the pine,  
    look up  
at the sprays  
    of soft needles,

figures of the desire  
    I hear  
in the sparrow's song,  
    the sparrow perched

high and alone,  
    paragon  
of himself. This  
    day I stop

in my habitual  
    walk from car  
to building  
    and know,

against the clear  
    morning sky,  
those bursts of wishes  
    in cadenza.

2

In the middle  
of June,  
in the middle  
of our lives together

they came to tell me  
you were dead.  
My husband,  
I did not know

how to love you  
when you  
were alive  
inside me.

Now, slim  
with loneliness,  
I crave  
the wisdom

of your erect  
penis  
but take the meal  
of emptiness.

3

My life depends  
on nothing,  
not spring's  
unrehearsed

blooming, not  
the poem  
I love  
that is written

in the book, nor  
the child's  
face which peers  
from the grave.

This is the year  
the song  
and the wish  
are one.

I have learned  
to stay alive  
in the center  
of our dying.

## The Man in a Restaurant in January

He sits at the table across from me  
eating his supper. About fifty,  
a university professor or insurance  
salesman, he wears a faded gray

turtleneck and blue cardigan.

He has a newspaper for company  
and props it against  
the salt and pepper shakers

but it doesn't cooperate.

He lays it back. It folds forward.

He struggles to adjust it  
with one hand, the other

holding the fork.

I close my eyes and see  
the lead article  
he tries to read:

*Nothing happened  
today. No one  
died or was born.  
No one spoke.*

(stanza break)

Then a tear starts  
down his cheek, and I  
nod to myself, his back  
to the cold glass,

the January night blustery,  
the lights in the restaurant  
dim, the waitress pushing the sweeper  
over the green-patterned carpet,

gathering the crumbs left by diners  
before us. In the dream over my soup,  
I go to him,  
urge him in his tears,

hold his face, kiss  
his mouth. His erection  
amazes us  
and we fall back

against the booth  
that becomes the bed  
from which we step  
whole and refreshed.

## Calm

Once I could be calm  
with a certain person near--  
mother, patient hands  
bearing soup and toast  
and the soft, cool cloth;  
husband with legs at night  
that fit mine and the warm  
smooth back; infant son  
whose sweet-smelling,  
plump flesh seemed still part of me  
though we were two  
bodies by then,  
one large and quiet,  
one tiny, murmurous  
at the breast.

Now I am calm  
with no one near.  
Sometimes it feels  
like raising a curtain  
to find no window  
or like opening a door  
to no outside at all.  
Then, turning back,

(no stanza break)



I try instead to remember the thought  
I had just the moment before,  
the one that came while straightening  
the sofa pillows, the one  
that made me smile.

## Katharine's Dream

A year after the accident  
when the tree stopped the car  
and I kept going through the windshield  
like a charmed fish  
bursting ice,

I dreamed I lay between boards  
and someone, a man, noticed me  
and bent to kiss me.

Between sleep and waking  
I sorted out it wasn't Grandpa  
whose shoulders, like the hulking  
fenders of an oncoming car,  
darkened me so many times  
I could remember the shadow, finally, only once.

He was a friend's husband,  
also a friend, someone  
I could have loved.

I woke with a happiness that lasted  
all that day.