

Porcelain Bells

for my mother

1 Candles at Three Thirty

The year fades without ripening,
but glitters as it withers
like an orange stuck with cloves
or Christmas clouds.

Bits of very new,
dream-quilted sky
are touched to an arrangement,
all but kiss.

Dark blue gathers around the waist
into a humbler colour;
two cottages flush with the road
slowly edge back.

When I am all harbour, ask too much,
go up like the land
to points and precipices,
meanwhile is my anchor.

The island with its quick primrose light
turns aside and walks away
from my swollen shadows,
but carries the road southwards.

Frail as tobacco flowers,
a featherweight seagull
still damp on my brocade curtain
is ready for sea again.

A meaningless white thread
of pale travel-sleep
rippling one side only
of his unlighted eyes,

intelligent and soulless,
sees everybody happening
as down a warmed room.
The upper half of the house made fast,

we try to batten the door-windows,
but one won't fasten,
the thin edge of the sea's blade
curves around its oak, rustless as flesh.

Out between the rosemary hedges,
sky and sea part in a long
mauve-silver tress
like an oyster shell

that has held life between its lips
so long,
it seems so long
since life left it wrecked there.

Winter's frosty standstill
will just leave the lips clear
as on a bridge
of would-be sunshine.

But now the intensification
of light in the lower sky
like a stairway outside
the side of a house

acts directly on the blood,
not the mind, to make the sea
appear more light than water,
familiar as a fireside.

2 *Story Between Two Notes*

You are the story I can't write.
Every page of you
has to be torn out of me.
Even after your death when you are alone
your mysteriously-suppressed
name-sickness
will weave itself into all I see.

It is as if you already listen
from the adjoining room, earthly wagon
harnessed to unearthly horses;
the red years have just failed
to take you out of the world
which looks like another world.

We sit in chairs in faraway countries,
like perfumes that have long since evaporated
complaining of being a memory.
We try to slip through the quarrel
like stowaways.

The only movement I am sure of
is that the fields are bare,
and at the dark climax of September
it requires but one sleep

for the ghostly art of the sea
to clothe his own deep trouble
up the white staircase.

Nobody has ever seen
the true shape of your lips.
You are walled round, a too-well-laid-out path.
You detour round the language
like a wound closing wearily.

But now, when this music is playing between us,
though I never dream meaning into it,
this winter-quiet that loses itself
completely in sound seems the active beginning
of a normal, if still secret, name.

And having filled this word entirely
with yourself, it judges you,
sets fire to you to resuscitate you.
There will of course be no further reference
to it: but the sound missing my ear
is that of the silence of your heart.

3 *Speaking into the Candles*

This death you have nourished is too orderly,
its fragrance too convincing.
You wear it like an unusually free veil,
so light it flies by me;
the mirror hardly believes it.
Or as if you were living in another town,
rejoining us with a completely different
handwriting, timid and beautiful.

Leaving the room, you break off a piece of the world,
around which my life is standing,
through which my blood spreads.

Missing so much world,
you still hold out your hands for more world,
your footsteps softening like a creature
before whom doors give way.

You lie alone on a new surface,
sharp as your own edge or a strange birthday,
unsleeping early in a new darkness,
too-awake like a brightly lit house,
its prolonged and counted light.

There is a closeness of many lights in you,
like stars moving forward meaningfully.

Every flower in you is everywhere.
Even if you were outside, where summer was,
you would still be inside every leaf.
Pain opens your hands like a book
or a two-syllable word I find as unintelligible
as the windows of other people.

Yet you are continually understanding it,
though now you are drained of all meaning,
and out of politeness try to remember
how to be completely afraid.

What do you care if I, your younger mouth,
stay or leave, though your dress shone upon me
when it willed me into existence?

You cannot anymore be the blue
in my eyes. What is the year to you
when you have moved outside yourself
and endure the motion of the earth
as not being right for you,
growing dark everywhere inside you
as if your air had been driven out
far above you?

Yet even as you refuse to be understood,
like your city in which nothing
is ever forgiven, if I dare
upon your silence, you cry it out whole,
with a full, upward glance,
like a nightingale.

I will survive this late-speaking love
when morning becomes conscious
it is no longer possible —
when the eternal procession of the sky
passes over it as over nature.

It will not be the night
between yesterday and today,
but these less shaken days
I would hold like a resurrection
to my breath.

When you find your way out
of the jewel-groove of your limbs
and the used-up breeze goes past
your icy eyelid,
already no longer anyone's,
I will dive you back to earth
and pull it up with you.