

Song for Flute and Oboe

I.

Electric lady saunters through the door,  
tough and urban  
the staccato of falling coin rattles from  
\$100 high heels. She cracks the spine  
Of ultra-sleek thirty  
uptown safe  
from the slash and burn silence of Manhattan  
Fashionably thin and tall, hot-eyed  
and original  
she skitters on the surface of six o'clock  
struggles to free herself from a jugular  
twilight, madly spinning  
from scraps of conversation  
again and again  
She gurgles  
of the leering dispossessed  
of some small blue song  
Clicking like a camera, sunset etches  
On the soft violent room   Simplicity  
Slips through the IV tubing  
And drifts into the empty corners she cannot fill

**Delicate peach music in  
rhythms of forest shadows, smoothly delineates  
the dreams of  
bones lost in the desert  
Waiting for garden-sweet language in the  
penthouse hours, she retreats into poppy seed sleep  
She is Peter Pan  
star of Never Never Land , Jazzy  
on alpha waves, she enters stage left  
and flies over Disneyworld  
landing in Bellevue  
on greased wheels, remembering only  
that the sky is blue somewhere  
She loses words between her fingers  
in the silence sucking her down  
coming apart at the center  
she cannot name  
the shiver of a daisy  
forms a shadow on the wall  
of her resurrection in blinking red neon**

Guru of myths and secrets,  
she works in the canyons of her teeth  
quiet exhilaration  
working spells  
Each time there is a small death  
she slips through stone  
a lotus in the jewel  
a burning

**Housewife of kitchen deliverance  
caught up in  
the rhythms of kneaded dough, her hands  
in the yeasty dark  
she reinvents the ocean  
becomes pearl or shell  
a voice of fingers  
deep in the muscles of your back**

II.

Runes cast into the dawn, scatter One here  
one there The smell of your summer body  
permeates the hours **I trace the moonscape of your skin with my fear**  
The stapler bites The spoon is my concave face **Nothing lasts in winter**  
hiding under the pillow or caught on the tongue of scissors **in the cold**  
I find new intentions **lying next to rumors of roses in the snow, I wait**  
I ignore the weeping laundry **the simplicity of snowflakes disturbs me**  
My mother clacks up and down the stairs **Kaleidoscopic time shifts**  
and shakes her rattle, "Ha Nee Shee Na. " **dances in strange configurations**  
Only the dirty dishes grant me asylum; plate by plate **I recover my life**  
I work through the prophesy of sunrise **as the sky slowly lightens**  
and gather up the stones of morning.

Afternoon salt pours from the radio **In the warm Atlantic of 1969**  
The labyrinth of dreams desiccates on my tongue **pregnant**  
My body closed as a clam **I return to the sea, tortoise**  
hours dance **on glinting waves as seagulls call and cry**  
back and forth across Nantucket Sound **In the third month**  
I go down with the Andrea Doria; in the **mysterious quickening**  
dark The barnacles build a second skin for us.

A twilight collage gathers in the kitchen  
Steaming cups  
of tea leaves swirl into the night  
Apples uncurl beneath my knife  
and fall  
into my mother's jelly Hot paraffin  
seal over the sweetness  
A hand of Solitaire, a Frank Yerby novel,  
the clicking needles, slowly release  
a pattern and shape of odd conglomeration

**Klatch mouths  
go buzz, follow damp steps  
grind thin days into  
thinner nights that slip  
past the heart's grab  
Fingerprints  
of salt  
knit together  
the lies of the past  
into the presence of tonight**

darkness drapes itself over the windows:  
the cat's whisker lies on the pillow  
a ginkgo leaf  
floats on the light breath of sleep

**a sign  
in billows of black silk  
drops from an ancient tree  
and becomes tomorrow**

III.

You drift in twilight  
touch the scattered faces lying in the mirror  
The room crumbles to salt,  
a long, thin curl  
of jazz  
brushes the edge of your tongue  
On words  
you slip into bottle or driftwood; summon the moon  
on frozen sand  
and open the night.  
An old woman enters the January cold  
her threadbare eyes unravel  
an icy wind  
An iron key  
falls  
turning over and over  
You follow the movement of words  
A siren batters the frozen air  
Your brain shuts down  
one finger, two

**Pale yellow roses unfurl petal by petal  
in the south window  
you ride the slow horse of pain, smile  
in the silk morphine gown  
the delicate joy of March sunlight  
In the evening you stroll  
among starfish and shells  
or dance  
as wind and snow find your face  
What else is left?  
On East Eleventh Street  
the sound of laughter, distant as stones  
the swirl of snowflakes in and out of doorways  
slips through your fingers and  
slowly into the gathering momentum**

## April in Giverny

“Only the water of connection remains,  
flowing through us.”

Marge Piercy

I.  
at night, lost faces  
appear on the dark water,  
vanish as the surface ruffles  
in the wind

a white specter  
careens through the moonlit garden,  
rips loose  
delicate tendrils  
slashes thick succulent roots  
into floating debris.  
a shrill laugh echoes.  
the ghost  
of my manic mother  
    loose in my brain again.

I rise at dawn,  
    with a small basket of grass,  
        and search  
    for the gold-green eyes  
of the kitten my father drowned,  
    but they  
        are lost, like me,  
in Monet's primordial garden.

II.

time hangs, still  
a soft green willow by the lily pond  
dense and warm as the April afternoon,  
the buzz of flies  
the skitter of water striders  
riding the surface tension.

deep, under cool green leaves,  
hidden among the stones and reeds,  
the voice—  
slim as a silver fish  
flashing and darting  
in sunshine dappled darkness—

“Don’t look!  
He touched her breast.  
She’s pleased, the bitch!!  
Mama. Please.  
Don’t let him touch you, Mama.”

III.

my dead father  
sits at the kitchen table  
black coffee  
and Lucky Strike  
defining his territory  
          one  
                  heavy German hand  
                          on the whip,  
the other sawing on the bloody bit  
          in my mouth  
                  he urges me out the door

God of Money, God of Women  
Oh I am your small toy,  
a pretty girl  
the bright machine of your making:  
lost among the boots and cigarettes  
the male jokes.

You are the joy of her body,  
the dollars in her purse,  
I am nothing.

dead cat of adoration  
strung around my neck,  
I shuffle through

searching for the love  
of infancy.

IV.

oh , mouth

will you never forget  
that first touch

the warm, sweet milk

nipple  
of your first desire

that full breast  
your blind need

struggling in the dark  
with your fear

your first loss

V.

there is no way back to her.  
when autumn turns yellow,  
death

whispers in the queer leaves  
flapping in the rain  
the world

shrinks to  
the blind mole of my mouth.

Feathered Stones  
For John Jacquez  
1922-1999

Every day we leave  
fingerprints on the wind;  
signatures  
that disappear  
with a secret Chardonnay smile,  
a shrug.  
C'est la vie. C'est la mort.  
We slip from our mothers' fingers  
like feathered stones,  
crawl through dark caves seeking.

For a time,  
we dress in incomprehension;  
the dreams and nightmares of psyche  
wrapped around our nakedness like  
exoskeletons. Until  
we peel away  
each layer  
of skin and bone, fear and exultation;  
until we find the eyes of Lear,  
the sagging hose of Hamlet.

Ophelia did not recover.  
Oberon is King of the Fairies.

Spring

The delicious fragrance of apple blossoms  
wafted in the window  
on chilly air, mingled with the aura  
of warm, clean hair on her pillow.

At fourteen-and-a-half, she was  
flaxen and fair –  
a Norwegian virgin;  
lusty as a butterfly.  
She adored her daddy's clean soapy scent.

It was May in Michigan.  
Violets and buttercups enticed her into the woods.  
She did not heed  
the warnings in her mama's voice.  
She listened

only to her dauntless heart. She listened only  
for that certain Prince  
she knew must come.  
All spring she waited. No sleek, new sports car  
slid into her driveway.

Not even a stick-shift Beetle.

So.

She took her daddy's Road King  
tight between her legs,  
and rode  
to Paisley Park.