

## **At Eva's House**

### I

#### ***The First Evening***

We sit together at the squeaky oak table.  
I am writing. She isn't sleepy.  
She says maybe she'll write a letter.  
"Well, what day is it?" she asks.  
I tell her.  
"I can't see to write," she says  
after scrawling the date.  
"And I have nothing to say."

I offer raspberry sherbet.  
She accepts.  
"Food is always good,"  
she says.

I offer to turn off the lights  
so she can sleep. "No, no," she says.  
"Girl, when I shut my eyes,  
I'm gone. You won't keep me  
awake." She demonstrates  
how dark it gets  
when she shuts  
her eyes.

The clothes on the line  
hang like shadows  
as night moves in  
like a dark tumble weed.

### II

#### ***What Smells at Eva's House***

Under the sink, 3 bloated bodies  
of mice float in fetid water.

Outside the door, the sewer  
is simmering under a smattering of dirt.

Four mangy dogs have the run  
of the place. They eat at will.

Mold, mildew, fly spots,  
wood smoke, ashes.

### III

#### ***What Eva Remembers***

She's 93 with vacancies  
and tiny bones that fold in  
like tucked wings.

Bruised from a recent fall,  
she runs her hand over the wound,  
puzzled.  
Runs her mind over the terrain  
of her life,  
puzzled.

Her uncertain flesh is draped  
over strings of steely muscles.  
She fiercely wraps fingers  
around my hand and recites  
with passion, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm,  
King James Version.

### IV

#### ***What Eva Forgets***

Who I am  
Who you are  
Where Bill is  
What day  
Or year  
Or century it is  
Where her purse is  
Where Bill is  
Who I am  
Where she is  
Where Bill is  
Who you are

What day it is  
Who I am  
Where Bill is.

V

***What Eva Says***

I do the best that I can  
And the heck with the rest.  
I'm satisfied the way I am.  
Damn Eva. Do it right.  
There we go. Thousand buses in a row.  
No Joe, them is trucks.  
Some with cows and some with ducks.  
Well, we take it as it comes.  
Oh well,  
if that's all I got  
to complain  
about.

## CANDLE

I want to speak with a voice that burns  
clean and hot.

I want to sing with a voice that leans  
the way of the wind.

I want my tongue to lick each word as flame,  
to burn the meaning down  
to purest gold.

I want my sound to catch the sun  
like concave glass  
that will ignite the tall, dry grass  
and burn the old world down.

I want my sound echoless  
to hold itself to the circle  
in the bell, struck once.

For this I thrust my lips  
to the cherubim  
and await the searing gift.

For this, I offer up my flesh  
in its moist, pliant softness  
and curl my tongue  
around the embers.  
Waiting.

## Ways to Approach Mortality

At the crack of noon  
the midpoint  
I surrender  
to the fall  
of afternoon.

With a tremendous  
ridiculous  
unjustifiable  
surge of joy  
and energy

that is pure gift  
from someone  
else's suffering,  
I enter the quiet  
no time no place  
realm where all  
will be right  
and all will be love  
and all will be  
fine. Very fine.  
All will be  
well. Not, I know  
when this day  
is done, but in some  
distant time  
and some distant  
place (which of course  
is now) it will be  
and I will be  
one.

## Eighteen Lines While Walking the Edge

Here in this mostly manufactured world  
Everything beautiful has a plastic bottom  
And everything real has mildewed.  
I am alone with myself and the steady rain falling.  
The earth is sobbing as she cleans herself.

They say the flavor of chicken lies under the skin  
in the fat, and the way to a man's heart follows  
the same well-marked path. This is the oldest  
and loneliest I've been for a while.  
Some things will change. The rain will stop  
long enough to dash between the clouds  
screaming for mercy which will be meted out  
in unexpected slaps across the upturned face.

The profane and the holy are hopelessly tangled.  
We took enough rope and have hung ourselves  
out to dry. But we forgot about the incessant rain,  
the steady, determined water. Our sorrows  
will drown along with our dreams.