

## Eulogy (for my mother)

I was going to say how strange it is that you  
are in such a precise place, but it's true  
that, alive, even, we are precisely where  
we are. Read a book. Imagine a visit. Stare

into space with a blurry thought about a day  
when, or one to come, and your body's in the way  
of your being anywhere else. All the world  
adjusts to your point of view: standing, curled

in a bed, running under the stars. There is  
nothing more to see than what there is  
to see. So your being in this grave, precisely here  
forever, is no surprise. We disappear

in a flash and are transported to a place  
that cannot be any other. It's no disgrace  
that it is not a noted spot except for us,  
and that at some point no one will fuss

over this precise plot. Birth is simply coming  
to precision, a gathering together of humming  
parts that move about briefly and feel and wave  
and before reunion have, briefly, a precise grave.

## Legacy (for my mother)

How will she fit the stories now?  
And who will be around to tell them?  
My aunt says she once danced on a cow  
When the two little girls were milking.

And then she invited a boy to the farm  
To impress him with her country skills.  
But Mother jumped back with alarm  
When she fired into the bushes and nailed

A rabbit, and cried. Or was that  
When she hit a dog with the tractor  
So it lost a leg? Tell about the spat  
With your brother over Roman candles.

Pretend you're on the train to Boston when  
You two prattled on in French I, passing  
Yourselves off as refugees. Go through again  
The tale of the hurricane of '37:

"Touch a line, and there were hundreds down,  
And we were goners." Said just this way  
When someone told it. Widower Brown  
And Uncle Wes, the Yale professor?

Aunt Lottie? Ada Bush, whose travelling trunk  
Was my college coffee table. She's a bead  
On the string I handle every night, sunk  
Into multiplying and dividing objects

And stories, pairs of images and things  
That somebody must count for many years.  
The animation's gone, but someone always sings  
A name that is the story's point, or colors in

The background of a sharp event. Now  
It is her turn, and every niece or grandchild  
Engraves the air with famous stories of how  
She did, and what she said, and why it is.

Now

Dickinson is dead.  
Newton is no more.  
Brahms is behind us.  
Washington was.

Where are the plays of Aeschylus?  
Where's Aeschylus himself?  
The Wrights have flown away,  
And Kahlo's dust for paint.

All the past has come to us  
As crumbs or strong distractions.  
*Beaux ideals* are evanescent charms  
That do not fill the bowl

We eat from every day. Everything  
That we adore as history has spun  
Away from time and all that is,  
Is here. Is your mother dead, too?

So be it! So let the greatest loss  
Be lost. Ghosts sit anywhere,  
But the hungry need a place.  
It happens: you mind your business

Humming the Duke, and down  
The street comes the reason  
To rejoice. Rejoice  
In the face of a face.

That is all we ever know. Was there  
Water in Eden? Oh, nothing like  
The pools and floods we swim in  
Every day. We've all to do

To stay afloat. Talk endlessly  
About the past—and drown.  
Keep chatter to a minimum  
And drink with your eyes.

For Ethel

No more poems of my mother.  
No more poems of death.

We've sold her things  
And spent the money.

We've rearranged the table  
And staggered the picture frames.

Nothing is feverish anymore.  
The stories of her life are fixed.

She is reconstituted already.  
She is pastoral language now.

She is barely particular,  
And mostly generational.

She held a place in history  
Until a child could fill it.

She has let go.  
She has let go.