

Perspectives: Explorations from Afar

EXPLORATION

There are two kinds of exploration:
One geographical,
moving over territory, seeing new sights.

The other, a mingling of cultures.
Connecting through skin, eyes, words,
often failing, now and then succeeding.
Something rich comes of this.
A lyric playfulness that brings
happiness and fear.

BELONGING

Where in that New England hamlet did I belong?
Not with dead leaves falling over our steep bank.
Not on a sled ride down a treacherous mountain road
 behind fat Sylvia from the tarpaper shack.
Not in the beat-up schoolhouse where I studied.
Not with the boy who attacked me in the woods.
Not with uneducated villagers who cared nothing for novels.
Not with the storekeeper, who whispered I'd had sex
 after she saw me take a late-night joy ride.
Not with flames leaping from our chicken house toward Father's face.
And especially not at country-club dinners
where summer people talked with assurance born of old money.

Yet I was wedded to the town.
I felt at home wandering free in the woods.
Strolling through the village, finding friends.
Exulting in fall leaves with colors so brilliant I was transported looking.
Sliding on my sled, rushing downhill on skis.
Searching for ice ponds to skate on.
Seeing the light-green lacy leaves that burst forth in May.
Delighting in apple blossoms filling the yard with sudden fragrance.
Treasuring the garden we toiled over while tossing away new rocks.
Loving the large lawn I mowed when Father was away.
Listening to the whip-poor-will crying across a field of Christmas trees.
The town occupies a serene place in memory.

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WHY DID YOU TELL ME?

Why did you tell me
you spent a week in
the mountains with
a married man?

Why did you later stand behind him
and caress his shoulders and arms
and pull him close to you
with your brawny male hands,
while I lowered my eyes?

Didn't you realize
his wife might return?

Did you imagine something
good would come from this?

I wanted you to disappear.

A BEAUTIFUL EVENING

It was altogether
a beautiful evening.

The house was well-decorated,
the conversation lively.

We ate at a long table
in a dark candlelit room.
We drank a lot of red wine.
I sat at the foot of the table
beside your husband.
You sat the head,
smiling at him.

We talked about religion.
Some said they'd turned
away from it recently.
Others said they'd
moved closer to
a belief in God.
Your husband said he was
considering Catholicism.

He placed a hand on my thigh.
I prayed no one noticed.
I gently pushed it away.
He moved it back again.
Once again, I pushed it away.

I'd thought in my later years
I could befriend a man
without fear.

DIRTY SALLY

The children found a kitten
under the school bus.
She, a six-week-old lump of fur,
had grease stains on her back.
“Can we keep her?”
“We already have a cat,” I said.
“But I guess so.”

The children washed away the stains
and named her Dirty Sally.
She grew up.
She was not good about cleaning her fur.
That was too much trouble.

At ten months, Dirty Sally
gave birth to four kittens.
At first, she stayed with her offspring,
leaving them only to eat.
Like all good mothers,
she cleaned the kittens’ fur,
nursed them, and slept with them.
But after two weeks,
she started to abandon them.
She was in heat again.
Who would take care of the kittens?
we wondered.

No worry.
Dirty Sally had help.
The other female, who had been spayed,
stayed with the litter
when Dirty Sally was away.
She licked them and slept with them
and comforted them.
Dirty Sally returned
to her kittens only to nurse.
Was she a bad mother?