

## **THESE ARE YOUR HANDS**

Here, where the babe lay, stillness now  
These are your hands holding my hands  
Both so empty even as we try to catch  
at life, our lives, whatever we imagine is left

There on the steps is our dog, uneasy in his stance  
as if suspecting the sea change in us  
He sleeps with one ear cocked, one eye slitted  
open to our strained tension-filled space

Our television, like some artefact, remains silent  
Closed off, as are we, gathering dust in a living-  
room that mocks us almost as much as the  
nursery and the family-room are wont to do

The names of things have never meant much  
until now when cruel irony seems to reproach  
at every turn; you are careful not to cradle my  
womb, as am I, that empty vessel where Ely

last lay in a perfect breathless slumber that  
will remain forever flawless, however tragic...  
Determined, we try to be stoic; don't you think  
our Calvinist parents would be so proud...

## HERE IN THIS PLACE

In the quietude that is yours  
now,  
Here in this place of deathful  
artifice  
I come to lay bare the secrets  
of my soul...  
Those, I seem unable to share  
with anyone still breathing

Does it give you some modicum  
of pleasure to realize  
that even from beyond the abyss—  
for didn't we both conclude,  
death's outcome, especially for those  
who rushed to the dance prematurely—  
would be that?  
A chasm of unfathomable depths...

Knowing you as well as I did,  
or at least thought I did  
I cannot imagine you deriving joy  
from causing others pain

My main secret is the same as always  
and as time slides by at an ever increasingly  
fast pace...I feel more inclined to be  
clandestine about this  
You are probably omniscient now—at least  
that's how I imagine you, crossed over

So, it will come as no surprise that I am still  
furious with you for dying  
And, as you know, not *just* for dying, but for  
taking your own life  
I know, eight years plus and still my anger  
and regret burn as hot as ever

Most of my recondite sensitivities have to do  
with death; yours, as stated  
My brother's...so many things left unsaid,  
so much left unresolved  
Now my Mother's...not even gone a year...  
when I think about her

**HERE IN THIS PLACE p.2**

and the issues left flapping between us...some of  
which I wasn't even aware until  
she had ceased to exist corporeally,  
There is a fine red mist...carnelian in hue,  
that floods my brain-pan, makes it difficult  
to think or see for a bit

What else? I know there is more  
But I grow weary of your columbarium;  
there are more ghosts here than just yours  
and all clamoring for some something;  
the very thought is as wearying as death.

## WHAT TO PUT IN, WHAT TO LEAVE OUT

After so many visits, it should be old hat  
Or failing that, a check list, at least...that  
But every time, it's as if it's the first  
In fact, as I grow older, I swear it gets worse

Or maybe not so much since I seem to need less  
I guess I don't care so, what I'm like in distress  
So oft times I'll go there with just the clothes I have on  
Then send home a list, let some others carry on

Once I'm ensconced in my room at the bin  
I get busy, or not, making a list for my kin  
I ask for my pet pig, my youth, my memory, my Dad  
And if they have time, could they look for my glad

Weirdly enough they all react the same  
Peering at me as if I'm playing some game  
Then backing away and smiling like fools  
Really quite funny since they don't know the rules

After they leave and it's quiet, peaceful, and night  
It never fails, I think of more things, find a pad and I write  
Chocolate, a fountain pen with purple ink, a map to tomorrow,  
An angel with only one wing, and something to read very slow

By then it's lights out or time for some drugs  
Either way it's all good, they hand out free hugs  
I know I'm safe here in the land of the loons  
And should I need out, there's always balloons.

## RETRIBUTION DAY

So often have I dreamed  
of this day, this hour  
I imagine you on my lap  
your warm body resting  
against mine, you asleep  
your thumb firmly in mouth

There is an air of reconciliation  
about the place that almost  
covers the scent of death  
and the stench of men afraid  
preparing to be put to death

I arrived as early as they  
would allow; the moon  
was well up, and fully waxing  
It seemed to bode well;  
a good night for dying,  
I whispered to you as I  
carried you into the prison

Time seemed to both  
race and stand still  
as we waited with the others  
All of us on those hard wooden chairs  
Still, light as air, you slept on

Finally, the sound of doors clanking  
locks being shot open, and him being brought in  
I snuck a peek at my watch; almost midnight  
We could hear them strapping him to the table  
The well-worn drapes screeched when drawn

I shifted you carefully to be sure  
you slept soundly before I looked up and,  
into your killer's icy blue eyes.  
As if beseeching something from me,  
he stared into mine

Minutes ticked off the wall-clock audibly;  
I held my breath knowing an eleventh  
hour phone-call could still save him  
And, you would never be free

## RETRIBUTION DAY p.2

He held my gaze unblinkingly and tears  
Slid down the sides of his face  
Did you stir in my arms?  
I glanced away for a moment  
and missed something

His last words...?  
For when I looked back  
He still sought out my eyes,  
but the poison was flowing and there  
was such a sense of loss suddenly  
I felt you float up off my lap at exactly the  
same moment he closed his eyes and also  
left the earth.

Surprisingly, even though you were *both* free  
There was still such a sense of peace  
I hadn't expected to feel that.  
No, I hadn't expected that at all.

## REMINISCING BEFORE SELLING THE FAMILY HOME

I find barnacles on the bottom of our old sailboat  
upturned tortoise-style in the backyard;  
They are brittle as a gang of great-grandmothers

and easily scraped off with just my bare hands  
I fire them effortlessly, like I used to throw snowballs  
over the peak of our bungalow roof, now burnished copper,

drenched by sunlight soon departing the day  
The yard becomes a blur once the sun deserts the sky for real  
until my eyes adjust to dusk's bathing every blessed thing

In rough memory I see mother laying beneath the elm,  
her skin the chalky colour last it was after they cut her down  
Even blinking rapidly will not dispel that flinty image  
and tears long thought dried up sit bitter on my tongue.

It's hard not to think about the men swaddling her like a mummy  
No, no—more like something cocooned really—before taking her...  
Body bags not yet the in-transit mode for corpses, I suppose