

## NEW POEM SUITE

### The Kuyker House

At the end of the first stretch  
of Adeline Street,  
where the houses shade from  
old and stately to  
old and worn out,

Where the long leaf pines begin  
to overtake the live oaks  
with wisps of  
Mississippi moss,

Sits a white structure with a red tiled roof,  
Spanish Mission, distinguished yet dowdy,  
to us kids always the Kuyker House-- somehow  
it made our blood run cold.

No clear reason why this should have been,  
except the Kuykers were believed  
to be old, unmarried siblings,  
had always lived there,  
and, we were sure,  
it was also full of cats.

Only two Kuykers were ever seen  
outside the place:  
there was Fanny, frizzled red hair  
old, we thought, at least 50,

Not that she weeded  
the garden or fed  
those felines on the  
crumbling front steps, no

Fanny, when I saw when I saw her,  
was simply studying then lettuce or  
cucumbers at Delchamps  
just like anybody,

or quietly  
waiting in line at Woolworth's,  
and, if I was right behind her,  
smelling faintly of cat.

I would sometimes see her,  
with an ancient woman, silent  
dressed all in black, eyes vacant,  
terrifying.

Yes maybe her mother or aunt,  
but somehow out of place

looking mournful and Italian  
more than 'Mississippi',

Rumor had it that the family,  
behinds those old stucco walls  
were all odd like that. And,

Rounding the corner on my bike,  
tossing the Hattiesburg American  
into yards, but not theirs,  
a wet yellow October leaf  
floating down  
to a carpet of pinestraw,

I felt proud sometimes  
that the dull drowsy block  
was blessed by  
this house of ghosts.

## 1957: Two Scenes

### 1. Hattiesburg

In 1957 my mother's lavender gray eyes were the color  
of soft summery rains that  
brushed the days  
one after another  
in Mississippi—  
March, April, May,

The patio behind  
the big house on Adeline Street was  
muggy and puddled —the birdbath seemed superfluous.  
The laced patio chairs caught pink mimosa feathers  
as they fell—  
a perfect place for cardinals

But my grandfather, leaving nothing to chance

tossed sunflower seeds like confetti  
from a brown paper bag,  
and the right birds always came  
two or four at a time  
poking around for every one of them on  
the damp flagstones Bobbing  
between the white wrought iron legs  
of the patio table where

My young mother sat in her blue housecoat  
and slippers, nursing an Old-Fashioned  
her gray lavender eyes  
burning through the high bamboo hedge.

## II. Family moves north

In 1957 there were rows of red apartments  
each with a glowing Halloween pumpkin  
staring at the others across the lawns  
as cold night fell  
And small dime-store fairies and pirates,  
skeletons shouted in bands  
bags rustling with Milky Ways and Kandy Korn,  
And the icy eye of Sputnik stared down  
from its slow sweep  
across the faint starred Maryland sky.  
What If the Moon

What if the moon just disappeared?

—vanished

Not from Shakespeare

or the Bible

or the ship captains' logs,

But now—or last night

cloudless, purple

lit with tiny stars, as if

we expected the gibbous light

of the night before

No, we were not dreaming,

the December woods were

bathed in soft silver

as we climbed, crunched the familiar icy path.

But tonight the moon was not there

Venus, Sirius and the other turned on

as the sun left and

what did the Icelandic fishermen think,

expecting a bit of

help from the sky?

Indonesian women leaving

their looms to breathe green air  
outside the stifling mills?

Vermont villagers coming out of  
each other's shops, pubs,  
looking up, puzzled about something,

And the oceans crashed confused,  
the tides shimmered, stilled  
off Chile and Tasmania,  
Barcelona and Cape Cod.  
Everywhere.

Dream Filtered Blue  
Cerulean irises, cyan reeds  
Fringe the black pond,  
as we step gingerly  
down the pondpath.

The hemlock and cypress  
glow green enough  
flecked by shadows

as the five o'clock sun  
turns their cones to gold,  
not 'gold-like' or golden,  
But Gold itself,  
so breaking

all the natural rules  
slaking my thirst for  
transport, for wonder.

No reason to ask  
if we are inside a painting  
it doesn't Seem so,  
and yet almost everything  
adds up but  
the colors,

I let go of your moist hand  
this last fifty feet  
steep and fast  
both arms  
needed for balance,

and in doing so, catch your eyes  
widening, quizzical  
your face more amazed  
than disconnected--  
but a little of both,



Red winged blackbirds

always welcome, just two really,

glide above cattails

some brown some black, some silver--

What gives? But the birds are

almost as they should be,

maybe scarleter, maybe more glossy indigo

than black

## **At the Armenian Carpet Shop**

Home from a spring trip to Turkey  
head full of blue and gold, minarets and  
carpets, I bought one in Cappadocia, they  
told me I had been given a big discount and  
that the graceful local girls  
doing the intricate loom work were  
being paid not to migrate to Ankara or Istanbul.

It was a beautiful little carpet indeed, really  
more of a tiny throw piece all aqua and floral, fringed  
in the Persian style—everybody on the trip said so,  
a splurge that would bring happiness, the Turks  
reminded me it was not just for me, but to be passed  
on to my daughters and any daughters they might have.

Such mercantile romantics, I  
delighted in carrying my carpet curled in my suitcase on  
the flight back to New York and not  
declaring it in customs because  
the factory swore it was UNESCO- certified  
and exempt from international duties.

This two- by- three foot silk on cotton rug radiated  
some magical power lying in the living room  
catching the changing light, its woven threads

reflecting changing windowlight, like the sea's surface as  
any sunny day progressed and yet

I was vaguely uneasy in that way we have  
of not paying too much, Not  
being a naïve American sucker- tourist so  
I finally took the thing to a local carpet store  
owned and run by Armenians, they,  
immediately declared I had indeed bought a  
treasure, the younger woman in the shop took  
photographs in case they could find a companion, oh

but I had paid too much, and the silver haired woman,  
mother of the first Emerged from the back of the shop  
took one look and said, "you know, there's something about  
Turkey, people come back so happy and they've paid too much.  
Those Turks ply you with tea and sales pressure, you are visiting  
royalty", she had nothing against Turks really  
Although she had lost much family to them 99 years before.

She knew, in the 50's, a young Turkish student whom she'd  
taken to the top of Riverside Church and he seemed so kind  
and oddly a little ashamed, she was not sure why--  
she guessed he sensed she was Armenian but it  
never came up really or if it did it was simply by way  
of introduction, as they looked out over the Hudson

he surprised her declaring, "I love my country but we Turks, all of us, have black hearts".