

**Natalie, 1967 – I.**

By the expanse of Lake Maxinkuckee,  
on train tracks ringing the water,  
we stretched our legs to reach tie after tie,  
avoiding sharp white rocks between boards.  
Two boys ripped by on their father's motorboat,  
weaving wildly close to us, shredding water lilies,  
spraying a silver plume.  
They hooted to our young figures,  
but we were busy singing "Cherish."  
We'd spent nights in your room  
watching the small black disk spin.  
Our voices lurched as we hit the ties hard,  
tried to land squarely in the middle of each.  
Next to me your tanned skin glowed  
against a white tee, and tight, yellow shorts  
hugged your legs, your knees cinching  
the full curves of muscles.

At thirteen, womanly hillocks coursed your body  
into an astonishing silhouette, while I hung  
slender and shapeless, marveling.  
We called ourselves twins, alike only in  
height, hair color, and a love of laughter,  
the warm intimacy of girls become step-sisters,  
girls who had found live-in best friends.  
I envied your flat belly and high breasts,  
not knowing someday  
an abortion would strip away the only life  
ever to grow in your womb.  
Not knowing I would never bear a child,  
no matter how hard I tried.  
We were young listening to the record trill,  
"You don't know how many times I wished that I could hold you."

## Natalie, 1967 – II

The large blue lake, the smell of marshy decay,  
the sharp odor of gasoline,  
somewhere the scent of honeysuckle.  
Children curled into cannonballs  
and hurled themselves off piers.  
My eyes are blue, yours were brown,  
your even white teeth broke the surface  
of your lips. High cheekbones and ears  
like halved apricots.  
That day we walked and sang,  
when, at last, I heard the train  
and shouted, "Get off the tracks,"  
you froze, your eyes fixed  
on the large white eye of that train bearing down,  
no one but me to stop your death --  
"Move!" I shouted, but you stood  
transfixed by the looming metal  
of machinery. And so I moved instead,  
grabbing your arm, pushing you.  
We fell together down the hill.  
A rolling tangle, sharp stones cutting into our hands crying,  
"What happened? What happened?"  
"Cherish is the word," still echoing in the hot summer air.

Twenty years later you took  
your husband's gun from his police car,  
pressed that dark metal against your high forehead.  
And I who lived a thousand miles away  
cried to the sky: "Natalie,  
didn't you know I would come?"  
I would have pulled you off the track,  
rocked you as that train screamed into  
the blood-splashed sunset.  
I would have cherished you.

## At the Zoo

In a strange otherworldly glass pool,  
a mother polar bear dips and turns,  
her cub twirls behind her,  
happy to be in his mother's wake.  
We humans watch her furry toe pads  
push off glass walls.  
The large white body  
silently ascends for air,  
the twirling baby spinning  
in a stream of bubbles.

My young son cools his face  
against aquarium glass,  
speaks to the bears, "Come here, come here."  
I laugh, stroke his hair,  
then a shadow darkens his face as  
Mama Bear dives for my son.  
Her ancient eyes coldly  
fixed on him - he is the enemy.  
Claws out, she flies at my child,

while he, dewy boy, chatters on.  
My arms tense to seize him,  
but I will myself to stillness,  
watch him flinch as she abruptly inverts  
her body in the water,  
slams those huge feet against the window  
where he stands. Her claws  
mean to tear out his throat,  
but he laughs, delighted with the game.  
Fear and pity grip me - then shame.  
She has a mother's heart,  
and so do I.

## There in the Song

A tree mushroom spills over the trunk,  
catches leaf-drenched sun on its lips  
opening a sturdy laugh  
to you who look,  
you who listen and hear silence.

The grotesque mouth funnels words,  
gargoyle-like it grips the tree.  
No body, no face, just wave  
after wave of smiles.

While you turn in sleep,  
the mushroom pours moonlit song  
over pebbles and brooks,  
across the eyes of night creatures –  
raccoons and owls blink  
remembering secrets,  
and the mushroom grows.

Spreading and folding under itself,  
the song builds and you wake  
wondering why you smile,  
there in the moonlight,  
there in the song.