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Young Woman Approaching Blindness

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after Rilke

At tea she'd sat just like the others.
But her cup, it seemed
she raised it somewhat oddly.
Then she smiled,
and, for me, that smile was painful to watch.

Later, as they left the table
and, talking,
made their way through the several rooms,
laughing and talking,
I saw her again.

She lingered behind the others,
drawing within herself
like someone who soon will have to sing
before a large and hostile audience.
In her eyes I was a distant light,
the light which shines on lakes
or on the sea.

She followed slowly.
She placed each step with care,
as if climbing.
And climbing, she would soon arrive at the peak
where, no longer merely walking,
she would begin to fly.