

1985

# The Present Moment

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I leave them wrapped in that stained sheet like a  
double larvum in a speckled chrysalis,  
they sleep with their mouths open like teenagers,  
their breath sweet, the whole room smells  
delicately of champagne and semen and blood.  
I let them rest, but I go back again and again to that moment,  
I watch them over and over until I get used to it,  
like God watching Adam and Eve in the garden—  
that first springing rill of dark blood,  
I eye it the way the castaway stares at the  
blackish life pouring out of the turtle's throat where he severs it.

### THE PRESENT MOMENT

Every time my father gets worse  
I forget what he was like before.  
Now that he cannot sit up,  
now that he just lies there  
staring at the wall with the dark rich  
mysterious liquid planet of his eye,  
I forget the one who sat up in the light  
and put on his silver reading glasses so the  
light multiplied in the lenses.  
Once he got to the hospital I  
forgot the man who had lived at home,  
lying on the gold couch with the pink  
blanket around him, like a huge crushed bud,  
the swimming pool just outside the door if he should  
want to go down into the earth  
in that blue water, water his servant,  
air his servant, earth, fire, and I have  
long forgotten the man who ate food,

put the dark seared flesh of  
other animals into his mouth, that  
good blood of the four-footed, or  
pineapple like wedges of striated light,  
the skeiny nature of light made visible.  
Long ago we have left that ruddy man  
with the swelled cheeks and the lips of a sweet-eater,  
the torso so solid it looked as if it were  
packed with extra matter the way there are  
planets a handful of which weigh as much as the earth.  
Left behind forever is that young man my father,  
white-skinned dark-haired boy who held that  
bourbon like a baby bottle in his  
beautiful hand. Everything is  
gone but this big emaciated man  
curled on his side, the darkness of his eye, the  
silver curve of his hair, his lung  
slowly filling up with fluid like a  
cup slowly filling up, the  
great curved spout tilted in the air above it.  
It is the same with my son, I look at him and I  
cannot really remember the time  
he could not put his clothes on but  
stood there in naked dazzling beauty to be dressed,  
I have forgotten the one who could not feed himself  
but sat in the highchair with his clean mouth open and his  
hands like bright useless stars in the air at his sides,  
I have left behind the one who wore diapers,  
dipping him over on his back and whisking one  
off and whisking another on, a  
brisk flashing of white, left  
behind is the one who could only sleep  
and drink from my body, his eyes on my face  
staring with a wordless steady gaze

the way my father lies there now with his  
eyes open, then the lids come down and the  
milky crescent of the other world  
shines there for a moment before sleep.  
I cannot push him forward or hold him back,  
I just stay beside him the way the boat  
stays abreast of the Channel swimmer at night,  
you know you cannot touch them, you see them  
faintly glowing there in the dark water,  
the strong pathetic star-shape of the human body.

## DEATH AND MORALITY

The one thing I like about my father's dying  
is it is not evil. It is not good  
and it is not bad, it is out of the moral world altogether,  
and once I am out of the moral world  
I can live as easily as any animal  
made to live in the element it inhabits.  
I can watch them empty his catheter bag,  
pouring the pale ember fluid  
into the big hospital measuring cup, it is  
neither good nor bad, it is only beautiful,  
it is just the body. Even his pain, when his  
face contracts, and his mouth makes a thick  
sucking snap when his jaws draw back  
is not bad, no one is doing it to him,  
there is no guilt, no shame,  
there is only pleasure and pain. This is the  
world where sex lives, the world of the  
nerves, the world without God,  
the world of seasons, the creation of the earth,