

## 1. Dinner in the Courtyard

When summer tears the maple leaves to lace,  
and blue shows through the green  
like those imagined distances,  
weaving through all things close at hand,  
then sunset looms for hours upon the scarlet  
tenements of day, unraveling curtains, windowpanes ablaze.  
The house is close, I say,  
and move the table underneath  
the arches of the maple tree.  
Not even the curious neighbors know  
if I am host or stranger here,  
nor if this roof of leaf and air,  
the little courtyard of the world, is home.

## 2. In the Garden

Where are the children? – Sido

Up in the hazelbush that stood for a tree  
at the southmost wall of the garden  
the children lived like swallows  
while their father and I cut grass  
underneath, and weeded and watered the yellow roses.

They climbed by swinging up on pliant limbs  
and imagined a different home,  
disposing all they owned by pieces of string  
on the branches around them:  
dolls, bells, bags of raisins, water bottles.

Parts of the house became a constellation.  
The children quarreled, sang and fell  
on the hill of half-moon grass  
we gathered underneath them, plash, unbroken  
as falling stars against the roof at midnight.

They rose and fell, delighted,  
walked up the stairs of grass into their tower.  
Although they never learned to fly,  
they overarched the swallows easily  
with their continuous invented music.

But where, where are the children?  
I've been to the house and garden  
lately, alone; the bush has tassels,  
the garden is overgrown, the swallows  
repeat their single note among the branches.

Perhaps the gypsies stole them.  
Perhaps they've found another home.  
Perhaps they'll come to light again next spring  
when swallows travel back from Egypt,  
nesting in the ships which still have sails.

### 3. Elm Trees in the Early Close of Winter

Elm trees in the early close  
of winter take me by surprise  
as dusk descends,  
take on, without my leave  
or wish, the color mauve.

A trick of atmosphere,  
earth breathing an upward cloud,  
or my imposed desire,  
or rising sap that swells  
to leaf in winter buds?

Elm tree, shape of my desire,  
what is color's origin?  
Perhaps the sun's  
light reflex as it moves  
under the world again.

Midweek I live along,  
Desires rise and face  
with nowhere else to go.  
Lengthening day, the empty vases  
fill and overflow.

### 4. The Last of the Courtyard

Who will believe me later, when I say  
we lived in a state of music? Passing birds  
and mice met on the roof, and danced away.

Francis played his silver flute, and Guy  
his violin; the children sang in words.  
Who will believe me later, when I say

we lived on little else from day to day?  
Life in the courtyard was its own reward.  
Mice danced across the roof, and ran away.

Carpenter, painter, potter: poverty  
is the sole good a singing man affords,  
though not at last sufficient. As they say

we lose the things for which we cannot pay;  
our houses were sold out, over our heads.  
Even the dancing mice must go away,

nothing remains of us but memory,  
a fleeting minor air, absently heard.  
Who will believe me later, when I say  
the mice danced on the roof, and ran away?

### 5. Eden

In lurid cartoon colors, the big baby  
dinosaur steps backwards under the shadow

of an approaching tyrannosaurus rex.  
“His mommy going to fix it,” you remark,  
serenely anxious, hoping for the best.

After the big explosion, after the lights  
go down inside the house and up the street,  
we rush outdoors to find a squirrel stopped  
in straws of half-gnawed cable. I explain,  
trying to fit the facts, “The squirrel is dead.”

No, you explain it otherwise to me.  
“He’s sleeping. And his mommy going to come.”  
Later, when the squirrel has been removed,  
“His mommy fix him,” you assert, insisting  
on the right to know what you believe.

The world is truly full of fabulous  
great and curious small inhabitants,  
and you’re the freshly minted, unashamed  
Adam in this garden. You preside,  
appreciate, and judge our proper names.

Like God, I brought you here.  
Like God, I seem to be omnipotent,  
mostly helpful, sometimes angry as hell.  
I fix whatever minor faults arise  
with band-aids, batteries, masking tape, and pills.

But I am powerless, as you must know,  
to chase the serpent sliding in the grass,  
or the tall angel with the flaming sword  
who scares you when he rises suddenly  
behind the gates of sunset.

## **6. Spring Fever**

At the wood's edge trillium shows  
mauve petals in three,  
bloodroot fragile white  
planets down the ecliptic of the road.  
I can do nothing better with my eyes  
than seek the early risers out;  
my self rides up and down,  
teased from sterner purposes  
by love and evolving spring.

Too restless to stay fixed  
at my desk, which faces city streets  
through windows darkening  
with dust and spiderwork,  
I ride my bicycle by morning  
out to country at the city's edge.

I never touch the violets,  
Quaker ladies massing in their dress  
of blue and white, the common pinks  
ignorant of their family's Latin title.  
Empty-handed, given to pastoral,  
by night I ride back to my lover's bed,  
trailing names of flowers from the woods.