

**LILLIAN BAKER KENNEDY**

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**Garden Party**

While the spring snow still lies against the fence  
and the china closet holds its pinks and pearls  
I dream of opening its picture glass doors,  
the clinking of goblets over linen set plates.

While chimes stir slowly on an evening's breath  
and muffled laughter ripples through thick bamboo,  
we'll gather once more by the rose bouquets,  
let the flames of the heart lick the moon.

## **Attar of Roses**

My neighbor buzzes her bamboo again.  
The warrior's slender hand extends,  
growling.  
The bamboo screens out the neighbors  
but not their wars.  
We live in peace, the bamboo and I.  
I think the bamboo may be deaf  
to the menace that surrounds it.

Peace descends over rose leaves,  
dappled in the afternoon.  
A plane flies over the maple,  
a solitary drone.  
There are no targets here worth hitting.  
We lead simple lives under pear and apple trees  
that linger over a chaise on a manicured lawn.

Silence now. The wind's a wisp  
through leaves being born again.  
Leaves that enclose the garden  
lift for a glimpse of light passing,  
settle into shadow,  
memory of winter gone.  
No voices distract the chatter in the limbs  
reaching out to the gauzy window.  
Swaddled in the bedroom,  
I am safe. Surrounded by  
these black-streaked sentinels.

Far to the East on a border,  
slicked black hair, valet hats and epaulets  
march like marionettes.  
Hand to hand, slap!  
And slam the gates.

Any time, overhead,  
the whistling may pass.  
Some will stand in fields,  
see the sun explode in shadow.  
Their sickness will be slow,  
slower than traffic stalled

over the erupted roads.  
The land will lie exposed,  
cleared with horse and plow,  
cleared by bullet birds without eyes.

We wait in verdant fields,  
all of the roses budding  
like their kin, attar of Persia.  
We sit by the wild roses,  
our knees drawn up to our chins.  
We picnic, our eyes slit for terrorists.

## **My Mother Dying**

It wasn't what she said  
when I leaned over.

It was the look,  
wide, unfocused,  
dark, wet.

I looked  
in that deep  
sorrowing sea  
of leaky boats,  
sailor's ropes  
strewn out  
over the clamshell  
stretched out beach.

Her lying in that bed  
on a white sheet  
it's own beach and  
her with her feet  
out of water.

What could I do  
but wade in and sink?  
The undertow sucked at  
my feet, my naked feet,  
drowning.

## **I Will Pray for Release**

They all struggled.  
A gnashing of teeth,  
Wrestling with sheets,  
Bitter shuddering breaths.  
None of them gave up the ghost.

I want to be gone in a thunderclap.  
Sneak out while the siren shrieks.  
Collapse when someone first asks,  
"What's wrong?" In one strong gust,  
I will drop all my leaves.

## Harvest Moon

The dog howled before dawn.  
I arose, drenched to the skin.  
When you reach the age of losses,  
the whole body weeps.

I drove east  
along the river  
in the dark, in fog  
that refused to disclose  
the next turn.

I broke the park  
rules to get in.  
Crows watched  
from high  
on dead limbs. Trees  
had begun to turn. The tide,  
low as thin ice over mud flats.

The dog and I followed  
the sandy drive, up the hill,  
by the empty playground. In the east,  
an orb so large, so close  
*the harvest moon*, I thought.

We approached through the damp grass,  
bending to see through the pine trees,  
closer and closer to the ledges.  
There, a full circle, the color  
of embers after all have gone  
to sleep, laid its color as  
a narrow, straight path  
on the cool, gray blue.  
The fog cleared.  
The day began.

## **For Lisa**

Here you are again,  
injured, your back  
broken with sorrow  
like a sparrow  
beating wings  
against reflection, and

I, your old black crow,  
want to swoop down and  
scoop you up,  
my little songbird,  
stuck in the rafters,  
in glue meant for pigeons.

Oh, sing again my sweet!  
For the leaves are falling;  
the hare will soon turn white;  
the snow-covered fields will shake  
before the hunters' bows.

## **Sing to Me No Words**

At wakes let the women keen.  
Let the men sit silently,  
only their bowler hats tap,  
tapping against their knees.

I want to give birth  
the way we conceived,  
mud-faced pagans  
guttural under our breaths.  
Breach the mask!  
Let loose the bare-assed wail!  
Sing to me no words.

At wakes let the women keen.  
Let the men sit silently,  
only their bowler hats tap,  
tapping against their knees.



## **A Few Grains of Sand**

A poem-note in a bottle.  
You could say that's how you found this—  
buried beneath seaweed still damp.  
On a lonely beach in Schoodic  
the morning glory closes  
when it's time to light the lamp.  
You can say you came at twilight.  
The moon was on the horizon,  
her mouth open to the ocean.  
Confess when you lifted it,  
stars flickered for a moment,  
but when you turned it over  
a few grains trickled down your hand.

## On Writing Poetry

You hear the call, a faint cry,  
down the long hall.

It is this voice you trace.

You strain to reach  
the hands that hang the wash.  
Tread softly as a penitent  
with a laundry basket  
among the fallen leaves.

Then, back in the kitchen,  
among the clatter of pots,  
the cat stalks. A phantom  
whines demand for dry food  
that crackles in its small, sharp teeth.

Night falls asleep  
to long halls,  
open doors.  
You don't know what you seek  
until the voice speaks.  
You move toward it,  
a ghostly presence  
in your own house.

Now rise from the bedchamber,  
a stranger wearing linen  
in the corridor  
where any window  
could snuff out the light.

Oh traveler, you do not know this route.  
You could go back to sleep,  
awaken to birdsong for an earth troubled  
by the drone of trucks  
ponderous on the pavement.

Trees grow on a lunar cycle,  
the cycle of women's streams,  
of living hands in soapy washtubs,  
of lifting up porous linen to the light.

I want to be a washerwoman,  
robust and ruddy in a large apron,  
my sleeves rolled up,  
the rhythm of the washboard  
to my scrubbing,  
sheets unraveling,  
long streams of white,  
fluttering over lawns.

## Vines on Paper

I can't say how much I like this time, dusk,  
the small bird whistling by the window,  
the dog lying on the carpet on his side,  
only the flutter of his heart and  
his curly chest rising up and down.

It reminds me when I was an only child  
of the stillness in the summer back yard  
by the lily of the valley spreading up  
early in the morning before the heat  
made me search out the shade of the park

I lay on my belly lost in a book,  
the way one lies on the beach.  
Other voices recede.  
Only the author speaks.

With time and no distractions.  
the silence of attention,  
listening not for the dog that barks,  
but for the dog that lies on the carpet,  
home, where there is peace, where all are well,  
where we all expect tomorrow as entitlement—and sunny, too.

I'm sure it will happen,  
and now I can sleep, restfully,  
deep in the pillow, snuggled under the quilt.

I might even count the petals on the walls  
as I did as a child,  
not out of boredom,  
but because they were so interesting,  
these patterns, trailing vines on paper.