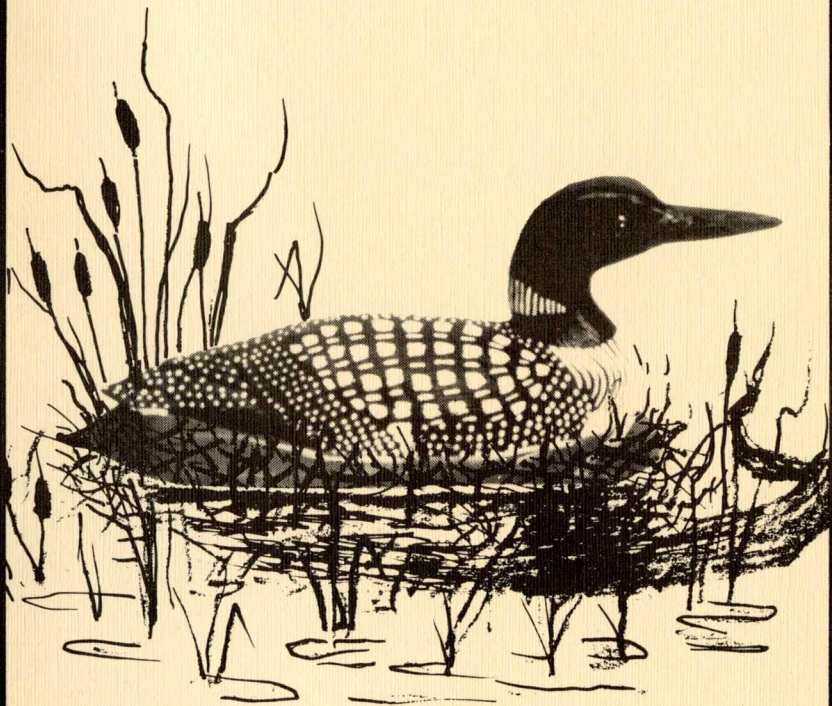


The Loon's Nest



by Julie D. Albert

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About the cover:

The loon is a fish eating, diving bird that inhabits our northern lakes. Sometimes it looks clumsy, with a floundering gait on land, due to the positioning of the legs far back under its body. Nevertheless, it is a high-spirited bird, and its early morning call is always music to the ears.

As far back as I can remember, perhaps a child of three, I had hair as black as its feathers, was full of unrestrained exuberance, and matched its enthusiasm for life.

No doubt this led my father to nickname me The Loon (Loune), a name that remains to this day.

CONTENTS

Preface	v
Answered Prayer	1
Thinking Stone	2
Old Folks	3
Naughty Narcissus	4
Upside Down Cake	5
Command Performance	6
Geometry	6
Footprints	7
Sunday Garden	8
Today's Bride	8
The Difference	9
Stepping Stones	10
Outcast	10
Tell Tale	11
Black Magic	11
Cindy	12
The Imposter	13
Spring Lure	13
Do Not Weep	14
Lost and Found	14
Fall in Maine	15
Legacy	16
Overnight at Grandma's	17
Stages	22
Alzheimer's	23
To Each a Season	24
On the Street	25
No Regrets	27
Color Me Different	28
Phylogeny	29
A Poem Is Born	30
I Will Know	31
The Summer Loon	32
Words	33
Spring Dance	34
Bear in a Cage	35
The Softer Touch	36
Transition	37

Letting Go	38
The Lesson	39
If I Could	40
Violin in the Attic	41
New Baby	43
Choices	44
Throwaway Love	45
First Love	47
Sunday Thief	48
Good Friday	49
Garden Musings	50
Plus Ça Change	51
Vital Sounds	53
Ubiquitous Spirit	54
Mama's Hands	55
Timeless	56
Widowed	56
Under the Attic Roof	58
Full Circle	59
The Obit	60

The following poems represent a wide range of feelings and emotions, joys and sorrows, satisfactions and disappointments that wove the fabric of my life---a life that slipped by while I was busy doing other things.

September 1991

Sometimes, when I believe
I want something very much
I kneel, and speak to God
of this, my momentary need.
I ask, plead, or even try to bribe
Him for this favor that I seek.
Then I wait
time passes
and yet more time...
finally I perceive
that it will not come about.
God, older and wiser than I
has chosen to deny my plea.
Yet, as I stumble on
day after day
my blindness
is slowly pierced with light.
Now I clearly see
the prayers that are surely heard
are those that are refused;
because I am certain
that it was much better
I did not have my way.
So once again I kneel
this time in prayer
of thanks to Him
for firmly saying "No" to me.

I sit
On the stone
I chose:--to think
When life is too much
And solitude
Beckons to
My soul.

I leave
For a while
This ball of dust
In my fantasy
And reach for heights
Where I find
Release.

And then,
I come home
Feeling so free;
My heart is renewed.
I made my peace--
When I talked
With God.

They sit around, like relics of the past
Or lie in bed because they cannot walk;
Their minds relive the years that went so fast
When they could work and play, and laugh and talk

So alike day and night when one is blind
So lonely both when the ears do not hear,
How frustrating the aged, confused mind
That will not find the words that seem so near.

Some rock, and stare at trembling, useless hands
Wait for loved ones they never more will see;
Dependent on someone that understands
Not unlike the children they used to be.

They pray for death to come and set them free
From life's prison where they no more belong;
And plead with God for pardon and mercy
Their only crime---that they have lived this long

As I kneel beside
my flower bed in May,
the yellow daffodils
nod cheerfully at me
bright parrot tulips
always smile hello;
but what about you,
fragrant little narcissus?
You look so innocent and pure
on your slim stem of green
yet, I sit back and wonder---
Did nature have to punish you
for some mischievous prank
in a spring long ago?
Else, why is it that
your dainty face is edged
with a perennial blush?
And by whose hand
have those lovely petal ears
been forever pinned back so...?

Quite abashed
and mortified
I bring out
my dessert
at dinnertime.

I hesitate
when I meet
my family's
questing eyes
and puzzled looks.

I have to make
a little confession
by way of explanation.
You see, this cake
was never meant to be
upside down!

Sometimes, as I awake and plan my day
 A little imperious voice penetrates my mind,
 And says "This day you will write me a verse."
 "Oh, no," I cry, "maybe tomorrow, or next week
 Today I am much too busy; I cannot possibly..."
 But it persists, invades my every thought;
 At first I try to shut my ears and heart
 Until I start to jot down bits of rhyme
 And finally lay aside the work that I had planned.
 Then I know I am not free to refuse
 I give in, and my surrender is complete.
 Somehow, I must respect that little magic voice
 Because when it says "Write," I do!

GEOMETRY

Teacher, I am completely lost in this maze
 Of points and planes, curves and triangles
 A hypotenuse throws me in a daze
 So do theorems, dimensions and angles.
 It's terrible how confused I can get
 When you send me in front of the class
 I cannot see, I break out in a sweat;
 I am certain that I'll never pass
 No matter how much at night I cram,
 So I've made up my mind to quit.
 By now you know what a dolt I am
 Do I have to keep on proving it?

What shall I leave down here on earth
 To mark that I have passed this way?
 Not much if you count riches, sure
 And in death, health I'll give away.

I'd like to leave the light of love
 The seeds of truth, a cheerful thought
 Maybe someone to think of me
 Memories that money never bought.

I'd also leave some written lines
 To note the path that I have trod
 A painting, and a lilac tree
 A way of life that leads to God.

I brought nothing into this world
 But when I die, as we all must,
 I want to leave a little more
 Of me than a handful of dust.

My little flower garden
 seems to know just when
 Sunday comes around.
 It wears a sparkling rosary
 of early morning dew;
 then hundreds of colorful blooms
 flanked by glossy green
 lift their faces to heaven.
 They whisper, and softly nod
 and at sundown
 bow their heads
 in silent meditation.
 If I could not see
 I still would know
 the wondrous feeling
 and special perfume
 of my flower garden
 in its Sunday dress.

TODAY'S BRIDE

How I envy
 the bride of today
 who presses a button
 and her laundry's done
 breezes through house cleaning
 with wonder sprays and wax
 prepares a meal
 of heat and serve
 and no bake cake;
 then, petal soft and sweet
 greets her young husband
 with a fresh, radiant smile
 and lots of time
 for instant love.

When I was twenty
 my face was soft
 unlined and fair.
 My hair lay thick
 dark and shiny
 on my shoulders.
 My figure stayed trim
 with no help at all from me.

Today, I am twice those years
 tiny wrinkles etch that face.
 Two decades have woven
 silver threads in my hair.
 And, alas, there is more of me!
 Oh, my friends tell me
 I look quite the same,
 but how well I know that...

"You haven't changed a bit"
 takes me twice the time
 and costs me so much more!

We tend to think of life as one
 The span of years a person lives;
 When we are born, death has begun
 God keeps secret the time He gives.
 The past is gone, today is here
 We were not promised tomorrow
 So now's the time, it is quite clear
 To do what we must, here below.
 The harvest we'll reap has its seeds
 Given us, but we have to sow;
 Heaven is won by little deeds
 One rung at a time, up we go.
 That's why there is no other way
 To live this life, than day by day.

OUTCAST

The gossips behind the curtains would hide
 And watch for scandals in the neighborhood.
 The young woman across the street, they sighed
 For one, would surely come to no good.

Neither did they like old Mrs. Todd
 Who walked by, in old shoes and faded dress;
 They called her eccentric, strange and odd
 She just went about minding her own business.

Hurriedly, unannounced, I happened
 to walk in on those two,
 my daughter and her friend
 in our living room one day.
 The records played soft and low
 but they acted nervous, strange;
 her cheeks turned very pink
 he was too polite, all at once.
 We chattered of unimportant things
 news items, the weather and such
 that meant nothing to any of us.
 They had me confused, at first
 it has been quite a while
 since I was eighteen, too...
 But the mystery soon cleared
 when I took a second look
 there they sat, respectfully apart
 young, in love, and very unaware
 of the faint, fresh smudge of red
 that gleamed upon his lips.

BLACK MAGIC

She must have a green thumb, they said
 Such lovely flowers, blooming red
 Really, when all was said and done
 She only had a dirty one.

I met her quite early in my life
 While visiting someone dear to me.
 Having just moved in as a young wife
 She expected food and lodging for free
 She would not cook, iron, sew nor budget
 Cared not to learn of any housekeeping ways
 She was lazy, and did not care who knew it.
 She went out nights, and dozed off days
 Her husband strayed away, leaving her behind
 Alone, with their several young ones to raise,
 But she really did not seem to mind.
 Patiently she bathed and tended her babies
 Still she'd leave them to wander off at night
 Was gossiped about, but never said a word
 She seemed confident that they would be all right.
 They were fretful and crying when she returned
 But before long she would fix that
 For dinner they would have a mouse
 You see, Cindy was the mother cat
 that used to live at Grandma's house.

We need no introduction, God and I
 So very often we have met
 In many forms, a master of disguise
 He comes peeping through the window
 Of my naked, vulnerable soul.
 He takes great care to hide His face
 Ah, but through His ingenious shapes I see!
 He's not only a beggar at my door
 Sometimes He's a friend of mine in tears
 A ragged baby that needs some clothes
 An invalid, with limp and useless limbs
 Someone whose home has gone in flames
 A mother who has just lost a child
 A person in need of a few kind words;
 I even saw Him looking from behind
 The vacant stare of a demented man.
 I try to be clever, always on my guard
 To be sure to recognize Him next time.
 Sorry now, but I have to run...
 In a nearby aged people's home
 A lonely old woman waits for me...

SPRING LURE

It's Spring! I hear the babble of the brook
 Inviting me, with rod and line and hook.
 I leave my cares, and hurry over there
 My heart beats wild, it's more than I can bear.
 The feeling of a nibble, then a bite
 Is all I need; the world once more feels right.
 I trudge on home, but now begin to yearn,
 To dream just of---how soon can I return?

Do not weep for me when I die
 Both heaven and hell on earth I've seen
 Learned to love and hate, to laugh and cry
 On the crest of pure joy I've been
 Plunged in the depths of dark despair
 In sickness I've trembled at death's door
 But His hand always held me there
 He would not let me in before.
 He is the conscience inside me
 That lets me act as I believe
 But finally will condemn, or set me free.
 So think of this, and do not grieve
 When in this world my sojourn ends
 Because, you see, the Judge and I are friends.

LOST AND FOUND

I looked for God, up on a mountain high
 It seemed I could reach out and touch the sky
 Thinking up here I'd feel His presence near
 But I was only filled with some strange fear.

The sun went down, the moon and stars shone out
 I sat and thought, the swirling mists about
 Alone and sad, far from happy and free
 No brilliant inspiration came to me.

So I came back, to face my daily tasks
 And thought, this must be of me what He asks
 On every day someone has need of me
 The young, the poor, the old, sick and lonely.

I lost myself among humanity
 Tried to forget my pride and vanity
 To serve it in its ever present need
 And there I found Him very close indeed.

Fall silently steals in the dark
 Impatient to try its magic paints
 And splashes the mountainside
 With a riotous display of color.
 The days dawn crisply cold
 Or, in our valley, with rolling fog;
 Then in creeps a sunny, deceptive warmth
 Drenching me in melancholy.
 Farewell, lovely flowers of summer
 Now rustling dry, and gone to seed.
 Around me falls a curious hush;
 The pungent smell of harvest
 Impudently assaults my nostrils
 Yet I feel strangely sad.
 The sunset blazes in gorgeous wonder
 But dark shadows descend too soon.
 The moon is a golden gleaming eye
 And I see summer ride away
 Down the star-washed autumn sky
 On a sparkling jewelled saddle
 Astride the black velvet steed of night.

As I look back upon
the years of my youth
she was always there
with a helping hand
and a ready smile.
Her sparkling blue eyes
and pretty dark hair
the soft tender hands
that would enfold mine
are etched in my mind
indelibly.
She spoke to me
as no one else could.
She taught me the worth
of a mother's precious love.
That was
many years ago...
Now she is gone
and life
is not the same.
But she left me
a priceless memory,
my lovely mother
of yesteryear.

As I remember her, Grandma was a tall, spare woman in her seventies. Surely she had more than one dress, but in my mind, she wears a long black silk, with creamy lace jabot at the neck and an inexhaustible supply of peppermints in the pockets. Her thin legs were encased in heavy gunmetal stockings, and her shiny black shoes had taken the exact shape of her feet, which pointed slightly inward as she walked. She had been a widow for several years, and lived with a bachelor son in a small house about a quarter of a mile from our home. He loved to hunt and fish, and would often be off to lumber camps for long periods of time, so that most of the time she was alone. In the spring, though, he always found time to make a large garden; and to this day, I have never tasted better cucumbers than the small premature ones we tweaked off the vines when he wasn't looking and ate in three bites, peel and all.

Grandma had slowly developing cataracts that threatened to make her blind, and also, due to her advanced years, had a fear of being sick during the night, perhaps dying without anyone to go for help. It is always late summer when I remember seeing her coming on the side of the road, on her daily afternoon walk to the combination general store and post office just past our house. On her way back, she stopped home, and she and mother would sit and talk for a while. There were six of us girls, and we would all sit on the staircase, one to a step, so that it was filled halfway up. From there we listened to all they said, hoping to catch a few words of the latest scandal, the neighborhood gossip, or whatever mysterious things grown-ups talked about. Then, inevitably, Grandma would say she was not feeling

well, and could she have one of the girls to sleep with her? By the time mother replied that of course she could, there was a soft scurrying on the staircase and all at once it was empty. I, being the second oldest, was often called back and told it was my turn to go. I would take her dry, withered hand and we started down the road. Several times she told me to slow down, gently at first, then more severely. "You walk too fast," she panted, out of breath, "and do you have to skip and hop like that?"

When we got there, she unlocked the door and we walked in to the unique smell of her house, a smell I have never found anywhere else. I sat in the austere little parlor and wondered how to spend the time until I could go home again. Awful waves of homesickness already engulfed me as I listened to the tick-tock of the big clock on the shelf. Back home, with nine other children, I never heard the ticking of the clock, nor anything like this awesome silence that gripped my ten-year old heart. Looking around, I compared the scrupulous order of the room with the turmoil of my own home. A bowl of apples rested squarely in the center of a polished little table. Ivory colored voile curtains hung primly from the high narrow windows. Beside my chair was an immaculately clean spittoon, whose purpose I suspect was more ornamental than functional. The high backed rocker that was "her chair" had smooth worn grooves in the arm rests. On the floor near it was a large vase, filled with paper roses on which a wonderful little bird was perched. Everything was in its place, spanking clean, newly painted, and I could have bawled! I had often heard mother and father talk about Grandma's passion for painting. Everything in sight would get a gleaming coat of enamel once a year, even to the long handled water pump on the kitchen sink and the dustpan. The little wooden outhouse in back was always freshly scoured, with a can of lime

in the corner, to be sprinkled after use. We children made many unnecessary trips there just for the novelty of it --- we had an indoor bathroom at home, which was no fun at all.

After supper, the*interminable evening set in. I took out the "longuevue", a wood stereoscope with its basket of cards which I had seen many times before. One by one, I would slip the cards in the slot and gaze at the pictures, always marveling at the way the identical left and right sides fused into one three dimensional picture. When there was not enough daylight left, I put them away; but she did not light a lamp until we were two blurry shadows. Sometimes, she would then play some records on the victrola. I dearly loved to crank it, but she would not let me because when the spring got wound too tightly there was a sudden rasping sound as the whole thing let go, and I was left with that awful empty feeling in my hands. So she cranked it herself, and we sat and listened to a plaintive melody about leaves scurrying in the wind. "Ah, la feuille s'en vole, s'en vole...ah, la feuille s'en vole au vent..." She leaned her head back and hummed along with it, her hands making little sliding motions back and forth along the arms of the chair. The wind sighed at the windows and around the chimney, my eyes smarted, and home seemed very far away. The record gradually slowed down as the spring unwound, and it was time to go to bed.

Upstairs, in her room that smelled of rose leaves and camphor, I sank gratefully in the feather bed, and after numerous nightly rituals, which included long prayers, she lay down beside me and started snoring gently. I made a mental note to get up early enough to get a peek at her false teeth in their little covered dish on the bureau, and maybe have a look in the drawers, too. Then I'd have frightful visions of waking up during the night,

finding her dead beside me, and hurrying in my bare feet to wake up the neighbors.

However, I always awoke when it was morning, to the tantalizing smells of breakfast cooking downstairs. By this time, my homesickness had vanished and I was glad to be there. She invariably cooked oatmeal, which she set out to cool in little bowls on a shelf in the summer kitchen. We each got one, which she topped with luscious brown sugar and thick country cream. It was then that I would feel a soft furry movement around my legs, accompanied by a low "Meow-w-w-." If Grandma had to leave the table for something, which she often did, I would slowly lower my plate and let the cat put in a few good licks. Then, as I innocently reached for the cream pitcher, she looked at me in a puzzled way, probably wondering at the upbringing of children who ate all the cream before any of the cereal.

Mornings went by fast enough, and soon it was dinner time. She always took out the same yellow crockery bowl and measured the dry ingredients to make "plogues", a kind of buckwheat pancakes that used to be the backbone of every French-Acadian meal. Carefully, she put in the flour, salt, and just the right amount of baking soda on top, then set the bowl aside while waiting for the water to boil. The boiling water was to be poured directly on top of the baking soda, to make mouth watering pancakes that rose soft and light, bursting into hundreds of little holes. I remember once, when she saw I was around, she said, "Now don't you dare stir in my bowl!" My heart sank, because I had already mixed everything together. So I sneaked in more soda, made a nice little nest in the flour, and gently put it on top. Poor Grandma! When she cooked her pancakes, they turned a curious shade of chartreuse! She blamed her "old wandering mind" for putting too much soda in, and swore to be more

careful next time.

One of her favorite dinners was a macaroni dish, with tomatoes and ground beef which I adored. She would put a little platter of it on the table, and after devouring most of it myself, leaving only as little as I dared for her own dinner, I would look around to see what else there was to eat, only to realize that this was the dinner. So I'd gobble up a few of the chartreuse pancakes and leave the table to saunter nonchalantly down to the garden. There I filled the rest of the void in my stomach with strawberries, cucumbers, tomatoes, delicious little green peas, or whatever happened to be in season at the time. She was not fooled, and never ceased to make dire predictions as to what would happen to children who had no respect for their digestive systems, and ate monstrous amounts of food, and in such strange combinations. I can still see her shudder at the abundant salt we put on our rhubarb and green apples, which we relished with great gusto and no ill effects.

It was probably the thought of what she would have for supper that prompted her to take me home. She'd tell me to come along, now, it was time for her to go to the post office and store again, and I was homeward bound. She would go home alone that night, without asking for a girl to sleep with her.

Today, thirty years later, I smile, but not without a twinge of nostalgia at this already vanished way of life; and I wonder what kind of memories my grandchildren will have of me.

She sits
by her window
looking out
at a slowly receding world
while the big C
gnaws away
mercilessly, relentlessly
growing day by day.
She has gone through
Why me? Not I!
I hate you, God.
Please, a little more time
I'll do all you ask.
Hot tears that drenched
the thick dressings
of her wound.
And then it came,
Dear Lord,
not my will
but Thine
be done.
Wrapped in
the warm
enfolding peace
of acceptance
she sleeps
and waits.

A transient from another life
his dull vacant eyes
know me no more.
The hands that worked
that loved and gave
twitch on his lap
disconnected
from the short circuit
of his mind.
Random pieces of yesterday
ramble through
faded memory
detached, obscure.
And yet I see
a bright young man
so quick of step
with twinkling eyes
and dimpled smile
all filled with dreams.
Whence came this cruel trick
that rode so slowly in
on wings of time?

Hello, Mother
this shadow
on your grave
is mine.

A bird perched on its nest
in the corner of your stone
stares with suspicious eye.
The seasons come and go,
are you listening there?
If not, then where?
Yours the first smile I saw
the touch so soft and dear
I come to hear you laugh
and reminisce with you.
Do you remember when...?
The baby birds
cry out in urgent need
as once did I.
Their mother rushes up
as once did you
with food and warmth.
And, with wild flurry of wings
sends downy feathers scurrying
and chases me away.

Cool pale fingers
of early morning light
caress her to life.
Important thing to do today
like yesterday
I must survive.
She struggles up
her back is sore
the pavement
is hardly Beauty Rest.
Scans the sky
with seasoned eye.
Ahead, the noisy clatter
of sanitary truck
I am too late!
Its all devouring jaws
are hungrier than mine?
move on---but nature calls
no place to go
yet cannot hold it in.
Ah, behind this sign.
Here comes a harried man
in three piece suit
and Gucci shoes.
He steps aside
this cannot be rain!
A lady minces by
with dog on leash
nature calls him, too
but he is clean
and rich
and lifts his dainty nose
at refuse cans
where maggots breed
and rats compete.

Still, one has to eat.

A crust of bread
an apple core
leftover hash
it is all food
and free.

Here's a glove
but there's just one
bitter cold today
one hand on the cart
the other?

My armpit will do.

Yesterday, tomorrow
they're all the same.

No home, and so no check
no check, and so no home.
Catch-22.

Only a hole
to crawl back in
not even mine.

Don't know words like
inequity, economy
porterhouse and caviar
only necessity
and little ones

from long ago
like love and hope
what do they mean?

Clouds part
in rosy glow
I see you, God
can you see me?

NO REGRETS

As my days
sift slowly by
like fine sand
in the hourglass
not one ever
to return,
take a moment
from your busy day
to remember me
while I can hear
and feel and touch.
So much left
to say and do
and yet,
so little, too.
Weep not for me
when I am gone.
Flowers and cards
sentiments dear
declarations of love
do not bring to
my empty shell.
Instead, stand tall
dry-eyed and strong
humming in your heart
fragments of the song
Thanks for the Memory.

Some there are
ever willing
eager even
to follow
in others' steps.

One, two
they sit
they rise
they nod
and laugh
then cry
on cue.

And, satisfied
never question why.

As a child I would ask
Why is the sky so blue?
Where do stars go by day?
Why do I love and hate?
When will I stop to be?
How works the computer
in my brain?

I was sharply reprimanded
Why can't you let it be?
Oh, no, not me!

All these queries leave
a great big gaping hole
in the dark recesses
of my soul.

And yet
I cannot help
but choose

this lightly traveled road.

I do not care
what others say.

There is no other way

I just
have to
be me.

Locked in
my memory
my mother sits
in a corner
of my heart.

She was not young
nor was she old
she was just there
always, for me
and my needs.

I knew her moods
when she would sing
in her native French
struggling to mend
her shattered dreams.

I'd childishly intrude
upon her reverie
demanding attention
and there would glimpse
the shimmer of tears.

It took so long
for me to understand.
It took those years
until I, too,
shed bitter tears of loss.

Not at the most
convenient times
these ideas of mine
urgently demand
their right of birth.

They push, they prod
press to be written down
and, if not acted on,
like pouting brats
with wagging finger
threaten to evanesce
to disappear
and not return.

And so
all else is put on hold
I acquiesce
and write.
Tomorrow
I may
draw a blank.

I asked ---
When all my years
have passed
the seasons
come and gone
and I have reached
the winter of my years
how will I know
it's time to go?

A small voice said ---
When eyes and ears
and senses fail
when all you loved
no more lends cheer
you'll yearn for peace
and sweet repose.

One by one break
the ties that bind
then, all business done
and farewells said
ah, you will know
and gladly go.

I heard your laugh
break through the mist
crazy, wild with joy
as early rays of sun
penetrated dawn.
What did you know
that I did not?
Sleek, graceful
in downy suit
of black and white.
Before I could
go out to fish
you dove, and robbed
me of my catch.
Some call you mad
and ridicule
your clumsy gait
but my heart soars
in speechless wonder
every time I hear
you call
my name.

They need not be
so very big
but oh! what power
words can have.
They can please
soothe and caress
encourage, bruise,
convey understanding,
sympathy, or wound
forever.
They elicit
tears and smiles
and sew the seeds
of hate and love.
They should
be used with care
because, once said
they can never, ever
be taken back.

How comes the spring?
It is not one great leap
that spans the gap
from bleak winter cold
to sultry summer days.
Spring makes a shy debut
escorted by shortened nights.
It lifts its skirts
and bares pale limbs
to ever bolder sun
dancing to
the old haunting tune
of flowing stream
croaking frogs
and singing birds.
One step ahead and two steps back
it tosses to and fro
rocked by wind and rain
inviting crocus, tulips
and daffodils
hidden under fluffy caps
of sudden snow.
Then, at last
it dons a frock
of lacy green
and, do-si-do,
extends a hand
in welcome
to waiting June,
and gracefully
exits.

She paced in rage
her bristling fur
beaded with sweat
oozing fear.
Small questioning eyes
darkly accusing
outraged at this
strange confining box
that had promised food.
Searching, grunting
suddenly lunging
at curious two-legged
onlookers.
Baring greenish teeth
exuding foul breath.
I have fields to roam
streams to fish
and raspberries to pick.
There are two cubs
waiting for me.
I cannot live
without blue sky
bound by metal bars
on all four sides.
Then, the man
opened the door.
The bear stepped out
looked around,
and with one indignant snort
slowly ambled off
behind swaying,
to the freedom
of the woods.

Lacking a pen
I plucked a thorn
and sat to write
with drops of blood
that slowly dripped
from my aching heart.
Though mixed with tears
the red was too intense.
It settled darkly there
and my pain, pulsating
turning on itself
would not be eased.
Lifting my head
I spied a rose
peeled petals off
and softly pruned
a lovely pastel
with velvet strokes.
-Slowly, healing set in
and my spirits rose
in healthy glow.

May, radiantly clad
in the delightful hopes
that the very young
claim for their own,
you promised me a summer.
Inevitably, it arrived
fraught with confusion and turmoil.
Hot, steamy days and nights
and turbulence in my soul.
I struggled with my thoughts
and ached and wept
through many sleepless nights.
Along into July
I made a choice,
an anguished one
that turned my life around.
Slowly, painfully
summer left.
Now, days and nights
are cool, crisp, liberating
replete with the calming peace
that bridges two inner worlds---,
another period in my life.
Even as my wounds heal
I prefer to remember
the joyful, playful times
the moments of love
and tenderness
of seasons past.
A new autumn dawns
May, be gracious now,
introduce me to September
and promise to come back
next year.

Even as my honest mirror speaks
of fine wrinkles and graying hair
I often regress to days gone by.
In memory I open long closed doors
to glimpse there haunting skeletons and ghosts
baggage cast aside as my adult emerged
so eager to embrace independence
and welcome freedom from the bondage
of early years --- so I thought.
But after all these many days
the old familiar revolving tapes
filter the perceptions in my mind
with their constant directions,
instructions, reprimands and reminders
their wagging fingers pointing shoulds
parental musts, always and never-nevers,
ubiquitous cobwebs of forgotten origin.
True, I delighted in being a child
but now I seek to evolve and grow
to understand just who I am.
So I pack my credentials and my scars
my life experiences obtained at painful cost
and slowly close the closet door.

When I was just a little girl
growing up in a big family
my father sent me to the store
on a proud errand, by myself.
On my return, he took the goods
carefully he counted the change
then as I left, he called: "Come here,
go back," he said: "and tell the man
that he gave you one cent too much."
I slowly walked back to the store
mortified as an eight year old can be
dreaming I could buy a lollipop
a bubble gum or licorice stick
but thought: "This is not mine to use."
Dear Dad, many coins have come and gone
but your straightforward honesty
your innate values and sense of fair
remain imprinted in my mind.
With fond memories I remember you
to every man his due.

If I could live my life again
now that I see my life in retrospect
so many things I'd change and do.
I'd have more courage, take more risks
if one does not, he'll never know.
I'd be more aware of my inner self
listen to my feelings and intuitions
and give rein to my fantasies.
I'd meet the challenge of the newborn day
wholeheartedly, with more confidence.
I would be less inhibited, feel more free
to walk in a warm rain in spring
oblivious to what people think and say.
I'd have more fun, take time to enjoy
the frivolous, ridiculous, and beautiful too
sincere friends, good books, soothing music,
pale dawns, red sunsets and starry skies.
A better listener I would try to be
open to novel ideas that come my way.
I would marry later, travel farther
place less value on material possessions
take more vacations, develop tolerance
patience, let go of my useless fears
better appreciate the blessings in my life
be more pliable and receptive to change
more accepting of different styles of life.
I would worry less and trust God more
waste little precious time and energy
on past events nothing can ever change.
I'd sculpt and sketch, and write and paint
I'd dine at midnight and sleep by day
make spontaneous love on a moonlit beach
and laugh or cry at any time or place.
The hands of time will not turn back
but I can start --- here is today!

patiently, night and day
in a shadowy corner
I just rest there.
The only dancing now
dust motes in weak light
filtering through
overhead cracks.
Sometimes a curious mouse
tiptoes by
passing through.
It was not always so.
In my decaying case
of reddish wood
I often shiver
in pleasant memory
discarded lumps of rosin
my only companions now
but I remember...
In the parish cemetery
sleeps the old version
of the once young man
whose gifted nimble fingers
could coax from me
what I never knew
I had to give.
How proudly
he would take me out
to parties, weddings, funerals.
Snuggling me to his chin
he would test my strings
then set his feet
to rapid tapping.
We played to dancing
to laughter and to tears
took off on our very own
wonderful flights of fancy
that left us breathless.
It was our love affair.

We had our day
and now I wait.
Perhaps in another life
I can sing again
for my waiting friends
if only one haunting tune
at the beloved touch
of my master's hand.

Make way
I'm moving in
with you
and taking over.
Your home and life
both night and day
will never be the same.
I'll let you know
what to do and when
in no uncertain terms.
You'll work for me
and wait on me
for no salary
but my smile.
I have no hair nor teeth
and do have lots to learn.
I'm not good at conversation
but will interrupt yours
when I feel like it.
You'll clean me and feed me
and sleep when I say you may.
My table manners
are just outrageous
I burp and regurgitate
and I wet my pants
turn my plate upside down
and throw my food.
I am demanding
but very charming
you will love me.
One day
I'll let you go
with no retirement pay
but with mementos, keepsakes
and fond memories
of my years
with you.
Then if I'm lucky
I'll be working
for such a boss
of my own.

Sitting on the fence
 of indecision
 in this matter
 what can I do?
 I have no choice
 I will ---I won't
 I cannot --- yet I can
 what if? And then?
 or else?
 I feel torn in two
 a destroying fear
 nibbles at my soul.
 If I do not decide
 life evolves
 seasons come and go
 day or night will pass
 I will get older
 feel better or worse
 the plane will leave
 without me.
 Even as I cry
 in my status quo,
 "There are no options
 I will not change
 all has to stay the same!"
 Time, the great perpetrator
 makes a liar out of me.
 When I declare,
 "I cannot choose"
 I make a choice
 I choose
 not to
 choose.

Have we really forgotten
 the first sweet stirrings
 of our young love
 so long ago?
 The promises we made
 forever and always,
 were they empty words?
 Just where and how
 did our dreams die?
 When did cruel silence
 replace tender whispers?
 How did shared secrets
 turn to harsh words
 and smiles straighten out
 to grim, ugly masks?
 Warm bodies that clung
 to each other
 crying with delight
 grew stony and stiff
 with injured pride
 refusing glance or word
 seeking any company
 but our own.
 Like life giving milk
 curdling at a mother's breast
 with the infant's hungry mouth
 only inches away
 where did our love go
 and when?
 Did it leave on butterfly wings
 that hover in summer meadows
 or was it strewn on golden leaves
 did it blow away on winter winds
 or slowly soak in April rains?
 Will we ever know
 if the precious love
 that sifted through
 our open hands

could have been caught
and held
nurtured with care
till we grew old?
How much attention
would have been enough
to rescue it
in time?

Sometimes, in reverie
the past years
roll slowly back
as a film reversed
and there we are
you and I
tasting the very first
bittersweet feelings
of young love.

The special look
your hand in mine
a secret smile
low whisperings
our first kiss
introducing me
addicting me
to love.

So many events
intervened
our dreams and plans
never really pursued
withered and died
unfulfilled.

Where are you now?
Do you ever
think of me?

My dear genie,
your shadowy form
cannot ever be
pushed back
in my magic lamp.
Reason tells me
we both have aged
but let me preserve
your memory
as Peter Pan
forever young.

With day's first light
 she leaves the den
 running swift along fences
 muzzle pointing
 ears erect, alert
 red hair ruffling
 on long bushy tail
 in search of food
 before the farmer rises
 to milk the cows.
 Slinking, barely blinking
 belly to the ground
 her empty stomach
 prodding her on
 to the chicken coop
 where unsuspecting prey
 perch warm and safe
 their fenced-in world
 dubious protection from
 a crafty fox.
 Church bells ringing
 milk pails clanging
 have to hurry now
 young ones waiting.
 Advancing, paw after paw
 with canine cunning
 frantically digging
 driven by some ancient
 primal instinct.
 Then, with sole intent
 lunging, grabbing
 in wild dusty foray
 of flying feathers
 a scurrying
 sharp cackling
 in urgent cry
 and final spattering
 of bright red blood.

Sunday dinner
 safely in her mouth
 she hastily retreats
 leaving to the baffled farmer
 her calling card ---
 the strewn carnage
 of fresh slaughter,
 a clever raid.
 She will be back
 some Sunday morning.

GOOD FRIDAY 1988

Sometimes, Dear Jesus
 I live
 as if
 I were made
 for this world --
 of flesh and bone,
 concerned with
 my comforts
 and things material
 destined solely
 for the grave.
 Then I stop
 and think.
 If this were so,
 would You
 have died for me
 two thousand
 years ago?
 In this universe
 how small I am
 and yet
 in my uniqueness
 and immortality,
 how great!

Brief furtive moments
 I borrow from my day
 to inspect every bud and leaf
 that sprouted recently.
 Before me, ever changing
 sensitive to slightest breeze
 bathed in golden summer light
 a palette in full bloom.

What wondrous array of colors
 each flower lovelier
 than the one before!
 Velvet petals warmly sheltering
 dark, honey coated seeds
 and pollen laden bees
 all bordered by foliage
 of softest grays and green.

I bend to smell a rose
 and pull out a stray weed
 in vain attempt
 to capture and preserve
 this visual feast
 and fragrant scent
 for winter reference.

Graduation
 Pomp and Circumstance
 I sit and watch
 this class of graduates
 in caps and gowns
 of blue and white.

Self conscious, shy
 in mother-straightened ties
 and blow dried hair
 radiating the absolute sureness
 of less than twenty years.
 They sincerely pledge
 to slay all the dragons
 and change the world
 starting tomorrow.

I am face to face
 with my tall grandson.
 My arthritis hurts
 on this hard chair
 the air gets stale
 the speeches are long.

Was I ever that young?
 My thoughts digress
 to a warm June night
 when I, with shaking voice
 promised the same
 for me and my classmates
 in memorized address.

The recession starts
 they're on their way
 with tassels turned
 brandishing swords and spears
 of diplomas and awards.

As I stand up
on stiffened limbs
I sadly realize
not only are my dragons
very much alive
but they've spawned new ones
of their own.

52

VITAL SOUNDS

53

We lie
side by side
absolutely still
as we have done
so many times
before.

Would we could
stay so forever
float into nothingness
freed from the demands
and urgencies
of every day.

As I listen
to the sturdy, steady
thudding of his heart
I am mindful
that some day
this amazing little pump
that served so faithfully
without a moment's rest
will go awry, flutter
and lose the rhythm
of its many years.
It will slow
in one final beat
and halt.

It will be still
this constant, relentless heart
God sparked to life
a generation before
made to hold such love
to know wild surging joy
both pride and shame
and agonizing, crushing pain.

I am not sad
then why this tear
that slowly trickles
down his chest?

54

UBIQUITOUS SPIRIT

We will meet
after I have gone,
in many different ways.
The pale golden stripe of dawn
that heralds a newborn day
will remind you of me.
From behind a rosy sunset
I'll promise a warm tomorrow.
I will be on the perfume
that gently wafts in
on a wayward breeze.
You'll see me sitting on a rainbow
after the storm has passed
and feel me on the wind
that caresses and cools your face
on a hot summer day.
I'll drop in on the raindrops
that quench your garden's thirst
and silently glide on snowflakes
that settle on your shoulders
in a silvery crystal shower
whispering holiday blessings.
I'll live in sparks of talent
that surface in my grandchildren
hidden resources
legacy of my genes ---
in a lilt of voice
a certain smile
a sudden laugh
a half forgotten memory
tenderly evoked.

If you must,
bury my faults
my human weaknesses
but do not waste tears
over a cold, unfeeling shell
that is not I.

55

MAMA'S HANDS

They were the very first
that my own curling fingers
grasped, and held on to,
claiming my right to life.
I remember them soft and gentle
warming my small cold feet
comforting my childhood hurts.
Weavers of magic they were
caressing, cooking, cleaning
sewing on a last minute button
recapturing piano melodies
she'd learned as a young girl
and, in quiet moments
feeling, bead by bead
praying her rosary.

Then, one August day
through my tears I saw them
cold and waxy pale
scarred, life buffed
folded by someone else
lying on a strange dress
atop her flattened chest
that did not breathe.

Take them away ---
these are not my mother's hands!
They exist now
only in my memory.

We had it, once
 the joy, the walk on air
 the oh, what a wonderful world!
 the unforgettable ecstasy.

We lost it somewhere
 along the way.
 No matter, dear
 we had it once.

Our love
 is no longer the dazzle
 of our young years.
 It is deeper
 more clear and tender
 shaped by the lessons of life
 a continuous fusion
 of happiness and tears.

Let us be grateful
 that in our youth
 we said yes
 and remain loyal still
 to the oldest code
 for man He made woman.

WIDOWED

You have not
 touched my face
 in a long, long time
 nor warmed my bed
 or read my mood
 not smoothed my hair
 and brushed away
 my tears.

57
 As I sit and rock
 and close my eyes
 clearly you are near.
 Your well-remembered touch
 your work worn hands
 I can feel
 across the years.

The faded tapestry is limp
 its former reds a faded pink.
 Next to the fine old porcelain
 a fly specked calendar
 proclaims the late 1800s.
 A well-thumbed book crumbles
 by a stained clay pipe
 in whose bowl a spider
 has taken residence.
 A hand carved checkerboard
 the green velvet covered chair
 a straw matted cradle
 with foot worn rockers
 memories of countless "ploys"
 swirl in the cracked ochre bowl,
 and all are loosely tied
 with silvery cobwebs
 under a blanket of dust.

I look around
 and see ancient faces
 hear ghostly whispers
 happy sounds, sad sounds
 as stirring as a symphony
 and am brought back in time
 to those who went before.

And I wonder ---
 How did this world treat them?
 How did they treat the world?
 They dealt me the cards
 and made me automatic heir
 to their complex history.

No moment lasts forever
 I hear the universal clock
 that marks progress and decline
 tick....tick....ticking.

Sparse and wispy
 on the baby girl's head
 clean smelling, fuzzy
 warm with bright promise
 smothered in loving kisses.

Then ---
 a shiny ponytail
 wind tossed, carefree
 rich chestnut brown
 golden highlights gleaming
 precious gift of youth.

Follow ---
 decades of care
 shampooed, conditioned, shaped
 permed, blow dried, waved
 crimped, teased and colored
 flirting for male attention
 drawing feminine envy.

Too soon ---
 seemingly overnight
 occasional white threads
 turn to a light sprinkling
 and rapidly multiply.

At last ---
 demanding less attention
 and receiving same
 this transient source of pride
 pink scalp peeping through
 time bleached, color of bone
 sparse and wispy.

I met her in the store
she was buying a banana
during a little walk
from her last residence
a nearby boarding home.

As old friends, we talked
tears welled in her eyes
"It is so lonely,
it is not home," she said.
I asked if she liked books
"Only if they're in French,"
and I promised
to go visit her
soon...

Oh, I prepared the books
but life's demands closed in
the days, the weeks
the months went by
it was too hot, too cold
it rained and snowed
I did not feel well
I had to write, to shop, to paint
too busy, it is called.

This morning, in the paper
I read that she died.
Time, unlike me
did not procrastinate.
Remorse and shame
filled my soul
my excuses were not valid
she waited alone
doubtless others visited her
but I did not.

Tomorrow

I will make time
to attend her funeral
but the little voice in me
will not be stilled
in the dark of night
it whispers
"You did not go."
I put her books away.

