

# **Poems Sent in 2005**

**by**

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Poetry Collection  
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## A parting

Will I ever read your poems again,  
Wisława Scywborska,  
1996 Nobel Prize Winner  
For Literature?  
Five times has the library extended  
The New & Collected volume.  
Today I must return it.  
It's time to wean myself  
from your perception,  
which shines through the translation,  
as does your wit.  
You showed me clearly  
how an educated poet thinks,  
how she loves – EVERYTHING.  
Am I mad to feel desolate  
at our parting,  
of which you know nothing?  
Have you taught me that content  
is more vital than form?  
Pity I can't read you in Polish.  
We're Slav cousins.  
I wish us both good speed.

## A Pulitzer

When I am ninety,  
I might be given a Pulitzer,  
but what bother it will  
prove to be! Someone  
will have to dress  
and transport me.  
On the stage,  
I'll sit in a wheel chair  
or next to a stroller,  
attached to oxygen,  
being honored -  
and then I'll have to  
give readings here and there.  
How tedious and embarrassing  
to recite one's verses  
while being decrepit  
and wanting to pee!  
Maybe a catheter  
with the tube attached  
to a flask hidden  
under my long skirt  
might make the ordeal easier,  
when I'm ninety  
and receive a Pulitzer.

## A scribbler's complaint

A few days without writing  
I give myself as a treat.  
One thing less to do, I say,  
preening before the practical  
mirror. No more dusty pages,  
which nobody will read.  
Aren't there too many poets,  
much greater than I?

But: for what do I live?  
Steady giving up  
fills me with sadness  
and there is little joy  
in acceptance.

Is composing poems equal  
to devouring chocolates –  
a crutch, an opiate?

How can I live  
stripped of carnal pleasure?  
I was not born  
to become a saint.

## A sleepless night

How can I live in the world  
and write poetry?  
The least things upset me.  
My ankles swell, I cannot sleep,  
your hands clutch my buttocks.

Time drips forward, towards  
another day, eyes are matted,  
anger and loneliness  
draw a wild design  
on my pillow.

## A transport

I don't need to march, as the Jews marched,  
head bowed, into the snout of a flaming oven.  
The black leather hands that push me ahead  
are my own. They can be redirected.  
All it takes is saying *No* when the twister  
swoops down to lift me – as I stand,  
forehead pressed against the rough wood  
of the barn, sulking, the little girl  
I once was, saying *No*. Of course,  
a vacuum will sprout, a desolation.  
But I will walk the earth calmly,  
as a sightseer, my days rolled  
like green bills in a pocket. I will  
not continue as a hungry bitch  
on an alien doorstep, performing tricks  
for the sake of an old sausage  
thrown to me when the time is convenient.  
I may grow deprived, but my center  
will be dignity, set like a granite  
pillar in a northern city.  
All it takes is saying *No* to seductive  
voices. The ground will be blood-splattered  
after the massacre, but from a roof-top  
I will raise my voice victoriously,  
free of stealing what belongs to another,  
no longer flexing tired arms,  
not once recollecting the reeds, the curlew,  
or the warm ripples in the beloved mouth.

## A warning

Some day it was – the sea rising  
in breakers, lashing the shore,  
misty in heavy rain, the foghorn  
luring, like a warning mermaid,  
signaling dangers of the deep  
with pearls on the opaque necklace  
of many layers that decked her white  
throat above the siren's breast.

Your voice was such, when I  
set it sounding, by pulling  
the rope in my lone widow's walk.  
The bell that tolled had flown  
like a sea gull. I hear it still,  
though I scared it away.

## A wave

Some partings are always the same.  
We say a few words, muster a smile,  
wipe a tear, wave.  
Next time we meet,  
we are different.

A new dawn, then morning.  
You are on the opposite side  
of the continent again,  
boarding another plane  
with your four-year-old  
daughter.  
I'm haunted by your gaze  
when I read to her.

The unsaid surrounds us  
as we swim in the uncertain waters,  
enthused or disenchanted.  
You dwelled in my body  
for nine months.

We meet as friends,  
then move separate  
to change  
in Time's current.



## Abigail

Who was the pale woman  
I saw in the dream?  
Was it you, Patti?  
At first, when I squinted,  
she resembled you.  
Then, her face changed  
in an almost mask,  
tight round the mouth,  
with chin pointed.  
Your friend, a woman  
never before seen,  
entertained me.  
We sat at tables  
and wandered country lanes  
while you were absent.  
Suddenly, the woman plunked me  
into a field of giant blooms,  
a sea of white in which I almost merged.  
Without bending, I pressed my face  
into a large blossom  
woven in fluid long petals.  
The bliss I felt at that moment -  
as if the field had stretched  
its arms of lace and embraced me!  
Dazed, I asked your friend,  
or was it you again, what was the name  
of the flower, and you said, "Abigail."  
"Oh, Abigail," I said. "You once wrote  
a story of that title." "I've written  
many stories," you replied. That was  
when your face changed into  
the almost extra-terrestrial mask,  
and I woke up remembering  
that you now live in China.

## About to become a substitute teacher

Soon, I'll be turned inside out  
like an old sock. All my tares  
will be showing. Scrutinized  
by the young for flaws, I'll be  
judged on a merciless scale and  
found wanting. They'll accuse  
me of most abominable crimes,  
because I am different.

But: I'll summon practiced  
strength to wave over them  
my broomstick, subdue them  
with the green sword of my  
eyes, scare the pack with  
the hiss within my cackling.  
One side will beg for mercy.  
That is certain.

In the eerie dawn, I'll recite  
incantations while driving  
to confront the class,  
preparing to be surrounded  
by teenage delinquents.

## Afraid of the dark

Take from me craving  
what I've not been given –  
a smile, a prize, words  
of appreciation, fame  
and, of course, money.

Take from me jealousy!  
Give me contentment  
which whistles  
like a simmering kettle.

Guide me. Please, take  
my hand in your large,  
comforting palm.  
Surround me by your warmth.  
The child in me is crying.

Lead me through the darkening world.  
Help me befriend old age, illness, and dying.

## African gods and Cuban saints

The brown angel Adele made  
and sent him, with me  
as emissary, is pinned  
to a Mexican tapestry  
in his living room,  
facing a floppy Victorian sofa  
covered with cats' hair.  
It gazes benevolently  
on the marble altar cluttered  
with candles in glass cases,  
holy pictures, statues of Santeria  
saints, bananas, rum, cigars,  
pennies and silver coins  
amassed for offerings,  
while the rose of Jericho  
spreads its greenish web  
in a bowl of water,  
laundry bluing added.  
On the wall above,  
scotch-taped snapshots  
of ancestors, of which I am one –  
levitate over the shrine,  
listening to his recitations.  
I note him crossing himself  
between supplications,  
and when he bows,  
I see my father bowing  
in silent prayer  
before his father's grave  
on All Saints' Day.

## A new start at sixty-seven

Shaken, but essentially unchanged  
by the death of a beloved husband,  
its brutal suddenness after thirty-six  
years of his steady caring,  
you begin to venture out of the silence  
of your Boston condo,  
hoping that old friends and  
your husband's Harvard colleagues  
will take you in.

You complain that you've never been alone,  
so after dinner, we sit and look at your prospects.  
Money is no problem, and you're still relatively young.  
Smart, well-off, pretty, you are likely to attract  
another good partner, because you like men  
And miss having a man around.

## Alone at night

He does not know why  
he wakes up at 3 or 4 a.m.,  
and why his whole body aches,  
why he's unable to go to sleep again,  
though his mind took off in a blessed coma  
for mere two hours beforehand.  
Early dawn switches on the wires in his brain.  
They're becoming a pattern, the pains  
and sleeplessness. He finds himself  
dreading the nights that bring  
thoughts of dying and death.  
What he reads and sees on TV  
makes things worse, though  
the world remains out there,  
and nothing can be done about it.  
It's his own helplessness that bothers him  
and the indifference of his neighbors.

## After an orientation

During the two days,  
the clock's hands  
moved at a snail's pace,  
as we listened from ten  
to five to a charming  
presenter with a French  
accent, while being  
indoctrinated, taught  
a new method.

Two times, we had to  
give a demonstration  
of what we'd learned,  
acting both teacher and  
student. I was taught  
to speak Japanese.

After taxes and expenses,  
we'll get less than  
eight dollars per hour –  
that is, if we are assigned  
some students at all.

## A Jewish American Buddhist

At seventy-seven,  
she keeps making new friends,  
finding worthy attributes  
in most people,  
especially those  
who come from far away  
to sit  
at the meditations  
she attends.  
Having witnessed and grasped  
the concept of transience,  
she tries to be useful,  
works with children in public libraries  
and enjoys having fun.



## A gray day

The rhododendrons and the pines  
cluster in thick walls  
between the house and the town.

The sky with its  
thinning eiderdown  
and the feathery snow,  
falling, falling,  
are like my days -  
a snow flake, a drop of rain.

My body is a pillow  
steadily emptying.

## A fugitive

Walks around  
the blade of cliffs,  
while underneath soars  
the perpetual ocean.  
The sound of falling pebbles  
that fray his straying feet  
reminds him of his lot –  
the precipice,  
which will accept him  
as final payment  
and grind him  
into its graying teeth.

The foaming breakers  
and the screams of gulls,  
together with the wind,  
sweeping back his hair,  
have already chiseled him  
into almost air –  
almost a cry,  
a brittle salty wave.

The village people  
eye him from afar,  
crossing themselves.  
They no longer lure him  
back to a bed  
or to newly baked bread,  
and the angels  
zooming around  
ignore him.

## A door in the floor

Based on a novel by John Irving,  
the movie's advertised as being  
about a marriage in crisis, ending  
in healing. We waited for the healing.  
Instead, the mother abandoned  
her little daughter completely,  
as well as her husband and  
the husband's teenage assistant,  
her lover. Perhaps that was the start  
of the healing, said my friend –  
a total separation, a clean pain.  
The wife was not emotionally right  
even before the two sons were  
killed in a car accident, the husband  
claimed. Having experienced  
a similar trauma, I disagreed with  
my friend about the supposed healing.

## A closed door

Divided from you by far too many miles,  
I take great pride in you, dear daughter,  
for you so well fill the space provided  
with children, husband, work, friends –  
above the field of slaughter  
my old misguided ways in the family instilled.

Yet will you ever share  
your secrets, sad head lay  
on my shoulder?

The door that once did close  
upon your tender trust  
despite the happy times  
separates us.

## A coen

Death caught you  
in flagrante. Several Juliets  
tear their hair, grieving,  
searching for your white strands  
in their comb, your voluminous voice  
no longer filling feminine rooms  
with the nonchalant humor  
of an actor bowing  
to much-craved praise.  
Your audience hears  
the sound of one hand clapping.  
You've been snatched  
from the stage, dear Romeo.

## A destination

I noticed the parked car rolling  
slowly forward, downhill.  
Stan Ingman appeared before me  
at that moment, offering to pack  
it with cartons. We were moving.  
The yard was filled with strangers –  
children, their mother. They sat  
at the table and made packing awkward.  
There were many pairs of immense skis,  
which required folding. Stan repeated  
that the car keys were missing.  
I remembered the baby, her last feed.  
She stared at me blandly. I put her  
to the breast. She drank, unknowing.  
Then we settled her to spend the night  
alone with two soft toys in a locked car,  
filled with cardboard boxes. There was  
a house ahead in which we would sleep.

I open a gaudy heart at six a. m.  
and chew a chocolate candy, a Valentine  
from a friend in L. A. Who were those  
people? Where were we moving? I want  
to retreat into that world in which  
I had a purpose, a baby to neglect,  
a house to empty, then push a car  
with faulty brakes, without the key  
to start the engine, *somewhere*.

## Americana

After a night of wild dreams,  
I surf the TV channels, missing  
the news of Hurricane Frances,  
called the creeping hurricane,  
as huge as Texas, lingering over  
flooded Florida, where three million  
people have been evacuated and  
four million are without power.

Connecticut again escaped being hit.  
A mosquito bit my left shoulder.  
This Labor Day weekend,  
I must brave two picnics of hugs,  
smiles, loud Ha-has and hot dogs.

## An avalanche

It cannot be described  
by words. Silence, too,  
proves insufficient.  
A flute's wail, the fanfare  
of trumpets, drums in  
a strange orchestration,  
crack of a lightning,  
a lion's roar, stretches of sand,  
dark clouds, mute calling  
to a dead friend for help.  
Rage, labored breathing.



## An ocean

Pack your bags, journey the way of wrinkles!  
The sky's eye stares, wintry blue.  
But on the doorstep, comforts:  
the newspaper, the mailman, with his smile  
and stubby pencil. On waking, coffee, a book,  
The tasks' harbor, but always the small room  
of self, or the verandah with Mother's geraniums  
that never need water. The walls are stripped of  
children and of lovers, though a *you*  
trips the weeded path along a shoddy carpet,  
for a span of time. Then the footsteps die,  
own voice hangs star-like on the ceiling.  
There is still time to murder and create,  
as Eliot says. Flesh, important in contact,  
another's mouth, the liquid, dizzy climb  
along that ladder. Wide leaves, grass, a jaguar,  
a monkey. I'll tame you in time's ocean.

## An organist

There was a young man  
determined to have me,  
marry me, but first,  
posses my teenage heart.

At eighteen, he was my first  
serious suitor. It flattered me  
he was a nobleman of French descent.  
My mother liked him.

I only remember  
saying good-by to him, never  
readying, rushing, burning, blushing,  
tripping on cobblestones into his arms.

We faced each other subdued, prim,  
his eyes pale  
in escalating fires. Once he did dare  
plant on my cheek a kiss.

He would play the organ like a mandolin,  
sneaking a love song in the inspired medley  
for me, who knelt below on the cold cathedral floor  
among incense and Easter bonnets.

He married, named a twin after me  
and became a lawyer. Is he alive or dead?  
It's forty-five years since I left the town.

Could he play,  
despite sagging flesh and wrinkles,  
would the precious organ still rise?

## Andulka, at ninety-one

Likely, she'll be there and I here  
one day. She'll look down or stand  
by my side. I will or will not feel her  
watching my movements or touching my hand.

I'll remember her slow years of waning,  
how, gradually, I called less often,  
how repetitious our talk became,  
as we grumbled about failing health,

pollution, crimes, misguided presidents,  
how more and more and less and less she seemed  
a mother, our native Czech resounding  
fake in the telephone pressed to the ear.

## Another dream

High up, an elevator waited  
to take me further. I became breathless with fear,  
then curious whether it was the going up,  
or the downward motion that scared me.  
Several times, I attempted to step  
on the rickety platform, which had no fencing.  
Each time, I found a man standing there.  
I held my chin high, as the stranger and I  
sifted through the air, like a bag of flour being emptied.

Spat out from the elevator cage,  
I landed on a carpet, smooth as an ice ring.  
Officious business suits glided past me,  
clutching folders to well-tailored lapels.  
I felt like a Rumpelstilskin,  
sweeping the corridor with an unkempt beard.  
What I needed was a shoulder to weep on.  
All movement stopped with the arrival of a wooden box,  
whose lid, like a dandy's hat, was poised above in greeting.

## Another summit

Another Sunday is lazily opening one eye,  
the upstairs crowded with late sleepers.  
We've climbed another little summit  
where we rest a while.

Our heads are full of liquor  
and late movies. We lie like panthers in the trees,  
gazing down at the week that's passed,  
the rambled days ahead to plunder.

Fired by ancient orders,  
the script of our lives folded on our ear,  
we beat the drum louder as aging progresses,  
the flesh a corn field scurrying to the harvest,  
the stubble, and the gleaning old women in the sky.

## Anxious

Muggy morning. On the upper  
lip a cold sore. Leaking  
toilet. No news of  
you. Your Mom's  
exhausted. Father, too.  
Big sister - ambivalent?  
It's not your fault  
that you complain  
and cry for food  
constantly,  
soft fledglings,  
small beaks forever  
groping for the worm  
on mother's breast.  
Even an easy birth  
brings stress; yours  
was so sudden - being  
surgically whipped  
out of nine-month -  
proximity  
in a safe place!

## Armsmear

For Mrs. Colt

Thank you for shelter, for a quiet that roars  
through the still rooms like wind in the chimney.  
Thank you for time waiting, lax with leisure,  
which blossoms with books, stimulating growth.

Thank you for time to feel, evaluate, let go  
the past which simmers with sad, lethal vapors  
and count the cost, weep, then turn from what is lost,  
allowing the unknown to enter, take possession.

As once we did

What if what we fear  
offered the greatest treasure,  
if gifts we cannot imagine  
in the most daring moments  
rained like a deus-ex-machina,  
or arrived before the mansion  
of our body in a coach  
dressed in lavish garlands  
and then were placed in our arms  
by a fine footman?

What if our infirmities  
peeled from us like the skin  
of an orange, providing  
us with the juicy fruit:  
ourselves – to taste, to offer  
a friend, a chosen beloved?

What if we walked with God  
as once we did in the first garden,  
desiring nothing but  
what we already had?



## Ashes to ashes

Over and over he keeps returning  
to the railroad where his father laid his head  
after his Polish mistress left him.

His father's three children, clinging to the wife's  
apron strings, rang like clear bells in a Siberian cowshed,  
while the meek Russian bowed to hostile in-laws,

a poor village orphan, taught to serve her uncle.  
His father craved a queen in black boots, romance, and  
whip-licking. Of these he dreamt, while carrying letters.

Being a postman, he knew human folly,  
its power to erase doldrums,  
hunger, which piroshki can't abate.

When she surfaced, a blinding dandelion,  
smelling of earth at a time of mating,  
he dove to her center, calling it home.

Forty-five years later, his son went the same way,  
colliding with a bosomy cowgirl on Iowa plains,  
teaching her manners and then marrying her.

The young bride soon turned into a sorceress,  
exactly what he wanted, not a Cordelia to old Lear.  
She drove him mad. He hung himself, lost in America,

barred from the native land, after his mother  
died there of heart trouble. In their ashes they call  
to each other, his unclaimed at a Boston crematorium.

## Automaton

A walk  
Then the long highway  
Hours of grandchildren  
while pushing the thought  
of burglars away  
in the isolated house

at midnight  
The highway again  
Church the next day  
Then a walk  
A nap

## Avoiding the oracle

Merely to skate the surface  
with water beetle legs,  
to float child-like,  
spread-eagled on the back,  
gazing up into the mute sky,  
Held up by the docile water's  
deceiving tongues, this desire  
bars her from allowing the pen  
to glide over the paper, releasing  
the Muse's unpredictable chant.

The longing to comprehend,  
which only the Oracle can satisfy  
is sunning itself in Gibraltar,  
turned into a woman who has  
given up dieting, who day-long  
nibbles on chocolates and sips  
liqueurs, reading poet laureates.

She's abandoned the TV,  
The New York Times,  
The Time Magazine,  
all news of the crusade  
against the terrorists,  
the bleeding Middle East  
with its suicide bombers,  
the world waiting  
for nuclear bombs  
to annihilate the Earth.

The woman has given up love,  
guilt, and most of tender caring,  
the belief she's right, justified  
in her lazing, while aware  
that from the bottom of the blue sea,  
almost reaching the surface,  
sprout fear's Hydra heads.

## Dancing in Bristol

Around the park she gingerly  
heaves the stroller with the sleeping  
baby, scaling bulging roots and stones,  
afternoon heat prickling skin.  
Her eyes are cast down like a nun's,  
avoiding loud neighbors. Isolated  
in the tight circle of caring,  
she startles when she sees – something –  
white, planted silently in the  
leaves of a dark pond – an egret?  
Its head a small knot, tying a long beak  
to a long neck, eyes pinned to a brain  
not bigger than a nickel, yet sufficient  
to the massive body, the smooth marvel  
of feathered flesh, balanced on spindly legs.  
An egret in a northern city?  
It remains motionless in the quiet water.

Later, an old man shouting,  
*Hey, lady! Hey, look – a stork!*  
wakes the baby, pointing to  
a stork, not an egret - like Nijinski  
with ballet steps striding  
across the sandy stage,  
while we, his awed audience,  
watch, breathlessly.

## Dark ritual

He holds the family  
hostage  
by his misery –  
the only pleasure  
he has –  
The mother especially –  
grotesque  
in her nightly  
dove-fluttering  
rescues.

He makes her  
savor  
the flavor  
of his lethal power –  
the thunder  
of the dark thoughts  
he shares,  
as he stands,  
burrowed  
in his quicksand sorrow  
beyond despair,  
sinking.

## Dead lover's visit

When you came to call on me  
in the dream, we both wore  
some sort of tights or long  
johns, loose round our legs.  
I was surprised to see you.  
We lay down in a hall  
of a large house on a trundle  
bed, hastily made-up by me,  
but soon it was time to rise,  
for you were preparing to  
leave me, for another woman,  
I assumed, a wife perhaps.  
Bare-chested men in trunks,  
carrying towels paraded past  
to and from a shower.  
A sticky unease between us  
is what I remember.  
You left a long rolled-up umbrella  
between the sheets, a memento,  
symbol for me to ponder.

Dear Kitty

She must be sixty.  
She writes books  
about her life.  
She brought me  
a scarf  
from Slovakia.  
She is overweight.  
One son  
has multiple sclerosis,  
the other  
cerebral palsy  
but can work and  
talk, sort of.

Kitty does not believe  
in life after death  
but comforts  
homosexuals and  
misfits.

As a propeller, glider,  
she daily gives what she bakes,  
her smile a loaf of bread,  
halved and steaming.

## Degrees of cruelty

The ladybug seemed dazed,  
slowly changing direction,  
as if blindfolded. I lifted my  
foot to step on the muddled  
invader, about to dispose  
by instinct of any insect  
on my turf. So far,  
that's all I've killed,  
spiders and flies.

I took the ladybug outside,  
to live in the garden, unable  
to consider it an enemy.  
It must have been  
the plainest of its kin,  
yet it possessed the grace  
of a Victorian heroine.

The game played as a child  
with its pretty ancestors  
endowed all ladybugs  
with beauty and magical powers.



## Deluded birds

The bright red fanatic  
I believed to be a robin  
boasts a triangular orange beak.  
Some days, about 9AM,  
he attacks my bedroom window,  
same spot, same pane.

This morning he brought his spouse  
as a helper.  
She used to watch him  
from the closest branch.  
Now she's  
indoctrinated.

When I heard the persistent  
hammering, I thought  
the mason had finally come  
to rebuild the fountain.

Then I saw both birds  
attacking the glass pane,  
frantic with determination,  
the plain hen hacking  
with her orange beak  
at her mate's chosen spot,  
while he furiously pecked  
at a new place on her left.

After a while,  
they began  
to hurl themselves,  
wings outstretched,  
against the glass pane,  
wanting to penetrate to  
that something  
they perceived as tempting  
behind what they considered air.

## Departure line

Surveying those I love, I note a progression,  
a waning, like the thinning of the moon  
as the nights distance themselves from its full face –  
an embrace in bed, gentle gaze across the table.  
The people who stud the skin are scattered like stars  
in constellations, some beyond the drawbridge  
of death, others in far countries or continents,  
and several more wait in the departure line.

Distance appears to heal wounded limbs, the lockjaw,  
freeing the shell-shocked head by sometimes burying it  
in madness or underground. It brutally tears the wings  
from the rescuer. The creaking heard is an echo  
of the armor, which for years had me  
circulating like an omen around the few selected men,  
women, or the creatures of my own flesh, children.

## Despair

They swarm over me,  
Invading my mouth,  
The ears, eye sockets.  
My nostrils, too, are filled  
With the bacteria  
Of galloping despair.

I gasp for air.  
I need help.  
I cannot shake them –  
The waves of thousands  
Upon thousands of invisible creatures,  
Pouring from the storehouses of the earth,  
Then feeding on me  
In their innocence.

They've been invading me in tidal waves  
For so many years;  
There is no stopping them.  
Should I surrender  
To their slow execution?

## Disagreeing with a writer

*Our greatest tragedy,*  
said Norman Mailer,  
*May be that we are not immortal.*

I wonder. For instance,  
in last night's dream,  
I associated with two women  
and four men never before seen,  
yet we conversed vividly as friends  
in rooms and streets  
I knew intimately,  
though they too were newly spun.

Then there was the night  
many years ago  
when Mother called me  
to assist her dying,  
flying me with her  
in her moving up  
to the strange light  
which may have been Elijah  
breaking the darkness  
with radiant arms.

That night she whisked me  
to the heart of Europe  
from Sunderland, a dingy English town,  
imparting birth to me a second time,  
soul to soul, so that I'd remember  
her finally smooth sailing  
into the unearthly brightness  
in moments of doubt.

## Discarded on January 2

The season of giving  
is drawing to a close,  
though its twelve days  
of glitter  
will not be over  
till the sixth.

No Christmas tree  
decorates his room,  
cards left  
on dusty shelves.

But nobody cares  
about his asthma,  
not even himself  
much,  
as he is now –  
broken and shabby,  
a discarded  
Nutcracker,  
no Clara  
dreaming him  
into her Prince.

## Divided

Make breakfast. Eat the bread and jam.  
Drink the coffee.  
Read; pick up the pen.  
The mind propels him forward.

What else should it do, dwell  
on the fact of death  
of one far away –  
one loved at a distance?

Something in the mind  
is pulling back.  
Something wants  
wordless dialogue,  
embrace of  
appeased  
longing.

## Dream living

Mother's sea trunk lay for me  
to claim at the bottom of vertical  
steps I feared to descend. A ship  
grew from the lowest step like a barnacle.  
A door opened. The large trunk swayed  
on top of stacked cargo as a crow.

A woman kept teetering down the steps  
that loomed ahead like an iceberg.  
Had I arrived – to depart again?

In a comic interlude,  
a village band played  
a polka trumpet solo,  
while I ordered leek soup  
from a shambling waiter  
who, I guessed, was Czech.  
He addressed me by my  
childhood name, and seated me  
with pomp beside  
two strangers,  
the rest of the vacant  
tables unreserved.

Earlier, a female doctor  
offered no hope for my recovery,  
yet comforted me by her calm  
presence. Each day, I slouched  
after my parents, who liked  
to walk evenings. They  
steadily ignored me,  
but I felt happy  
to have them near,  
living.

## Eager to read more

I may be falling in love again,  
this time with an eighty-two-year-old  
Portuguese poet, Eugenio de Andrade,  
whose book I'm reading in Czech.  
But what do I know about this man,  
except what I learned from a brief bio  
and a few pages of selected verse.  
He published, I read, his first  
book at age nineteen. That's how  
fascination begins – with an eye against  
a gap between the planks of a dark cabin,  
gazing at a thin slice of mystery,  
illuminated outside. How often color  
of light figures in Andrade's poems! I can't wait  
to be led deeper into his light.



## Early birthday

We'll celebrate your birthday  
a few days earlier, glad  
to have you with us  
at all.

Though usually in flight,  
but at present  
hovering between continents,  
you will in time be sure  
which direction to take  
in private life.

You've seen  
that everything passes  
and have learned  
to treasure fun and games.

You also know we love you,  
attempting to rise higher  
and be of more service.

## Eerie take

With each visit they leave  
footsteps in the ground –  
giant feet, assaulting with  
the same self-assured pressure.  
They hover in the kitchen  
near the pots, after being fed  
the same meal, one at noon,  
the other at nightfall,  
equal smile wrapping their  
cheeks like brown paper,  
the package being already  
in the mail, its addressee  
a woman compact, awaiting  
them like a bathroom basin.  
Yet they stretch their arms  
like Cary Grant in an old movie.  
She makes them disappear  
by pressing a worn TV button,  
while the curtains hang orange  
on the trees, the quicksand  
repeating itself, the script  
ingrained in memory, haunting  
the aging Scarlet, whose Ashley  
hung himself, whose Rhett Butler  
married a Melanie.

## Elephant walk

In the movie, Elizabeth Taylor  
loved only her husband, though he  
treated her badly, being a man  
possessed, such as women dote on.

The plot took place in Assam,  
where upright villagers were ruled  
by tall British polo-players,  
all distant cousins of the King.

When I lived in India, the humidity  
was good only for cotton.  
Elizabeth Taylor's taffeta skirts  
rustled with crisp petticoats.  
She moved as if she'd just  
stepped out of a shower.

Of course she was rescued –  
by her husband – when elephants  
walked through the bungalow,  
spilling a tank of gasoline,  
setting the house on fire,

while I, who'd for years  
stared at films but never learned  
the tricks of women men desire,  
like a dumb elephant destroyed  
a failing marriage, my husband,  
in revenge, turning to native women.

## Elsa

In the late afternoons, she sits,  
watching a television program with her new friends  
in the lounge of the Prague Jewish Home for the Elderly,  
after languishing four months in hospital.

The residents bear the concentration camps' numbers  
on their arms. Occasionally, they remember  
Auschwitz, Buchenwald, talk about the people  
they knew there, now so long gone.

In 1945, my mother took me to visit her  
in Prague, a cousin she never before mentioned.  
At fourteen, I was dazzled by her merry cheekbones,  
above which cocked elegant hats she made for a living.

In the camps, she lost a young husband, a baby,  
and numerous relatives. Later, she remarried -  
a man who then died of leukemia.  
At ninety-one, she does not mind sharing her room

with four other women. Her own apartment  
is to be signed over to her grand nephew.  
I may never see her again, but I wish her well.  
In her features she resembles my mother.

## Empty

So many hours ahead  
in each day – how scary!  
Suddenly tired of self-  
appointed tasks, I stare  
into what seems useless  
time and long for youth,  
its energy – full of  
turmoil and deadlines.

## End of an era

On Sunday, at a sale, she buys shoes worth  
\$150 that make her feel pretty several hours,  
wearing a coat purchased the day before.

Elegant, in early Hollywood air, she drives  
to work in high heels, draped in gray,  
her boss's cold eyes then mirroring her.

From his pale lips freezing words do fall,  
with an indifferent tone announcing the end  
of her contract. That way fame ends for hags

like Abishag, though Robert Frost  
writes about them washing doorsteps.

## Eternity

There is little to do.  
We live,  
coping with disasters,  
padding up  
the emptiness  
with dreams.

Smiles of homeless friends  
sustain us on  
crutches.

Each morning,  
Raggety-Anned,  
we rise.  
Each night,  
we bury defeat  
in sleep.

High above  
our head  
hums  
eternity.

## Expecting a call from a daughter

While wading through  
the lengthy rhythm  
of Wallace Steven's  
"Blue Guitar," I feel  
you near, though far  
you are, yet soon  
your voice will sound  
in the telephone.  
Whatever the news,  
I'll capture under the words  
The nervous tension –  
let it be gladness, be it  
peace! Steven strove  
for things that are,  
questioning how true  
known facts are, feeling,  
thought his reality.  
In an epoch of lethal  
omens, I wish you well  
at all times.



## Explaining grief to two-week-old twins

Fay, babies,  
is my friend, a lady  
a few years older  
than your Babi.  
Her husband died  
two months ago.  
I asked her out  
for lunch.  
She declined.  
The reason?  
She owes  
her grandson  
of four years  
a visit to the mall.  
It's as if it happened  
yesterday,  
she said about her husband Jack  
dying during the night  
of massive brain  
hemorrhage.  
Can you sleep,  
I asked.  
That has never been  
a problem, she replied.  
It seems that Fay sleeps,  
dear babies,  
as much as you.