

Of asphodel, that grows
like a buttercup
upon its branching stem—
save that it's green and woody.

I come, my sweet,
to sing to you.

We lived long together
a life filled
with flowers. If you will,
with flowers. So that
I was cheered
when I came first to know
that you loved flowers also.

In hell. Today
I'm filled with the fading memory of those
flowers
that we both loved,
even to this poor
colorless thing—

I know it
when I was a child-
little prized among the living
but the dead see,
asking among
themselves:
What do I remember
that was shaped
as this thing is shaped?
while our eyes fill
with tears.
Of love, abiding love
it will be telling
though too weak a wash of
crimson
colors it
to make it wholly credible.
There is something
something urgent
I have to say to you

and you alone
but it must wait
while I drink in
the joy of your approach,
perhaps for the last time.
And so
with fear in my heart
I drag it out
and keep on talking
for I dare not stop.
Listen while I talk on
against time.
It will not be
for long.
I have forgot
and yet I see clearly enough
something
central to the sky
which ranges round it.
An odor

springs from it!

A sweetest odor!

Honeysuckle! And now
there comes the buzzing of a bee!

and a whole flood

of sister memories!

Only give me time,

time to recall them

before I shall speak out.

Give me time,

time.

When I was a boy

I kept a book

to which, from time

to time,

I added pressed flowers

until, after a time,

I had a good collection.

The asphodel,

forebodingly,

among them.

I bring you,

reawakened
a memory of those flowers.

They were sweet
when I pressed them
and retained
something of their sweetness
a long time.

It is a curious odor,
a moral odor,
that brings me
near to you.

The color
was the first to go.
There had come to me
a challenge,
your dear self,
mortal as I was,
the lily's throat

to the hummingbird!
Endless wealth,
I thought,
held out its arms to me.
A thousand tropics
in an apple blossom.
The generous earth itself
gave us lief.
The whole world
became my garden!
But the sea
which no one tends
is also a garden
when the sun strikes it
and the waves
are wakened.
I have seen it
and so have you
when it puts all flowers
to shame.

Too, there are the starfish
stiffened by the sun
and other sea wrack
and weeds. We knew that
along with the rest of it
for we were born by the sea,
knew its rose hedges
to the very water's brink.
There the pink mallow grows
and in their season
strawberries
and there, later,
we went to gather
the wild plum.

I cannot say
that I have gone to hell
for your love
but often
found myself there
in your pursuit.

I do not like it
and wanted to be
in heaven. Hear me out.

Do not turn away.

I have learned much in my life
from books
and out of them
about love.

Death
is not the end of it.

There is a hierarchy
which can be attained,
I think,

in its service.

Its guerdon
is a fairy flower;
a cat of twenty lives.

If no one came to try it
the world
would be the loser.

in our minds,
and read a book together.

You remember?

It was a serious book.

And so books

entered our lives.

The sea! The sea!

Always

when I think of the sea

there comes to mind

the Iliad

and Helen's public fault

that bred it.

Were it not for that

there would have been

no poem but the world

if we had remembered,

those crimson petals

spilled among the stones,

would have called it simply

murder.

The sexual world that bloomed then

sending so many

disinterested

men to their graves

has left its memory

to a race of fools

or heroes

if silence is a virtue.

The sea alone

with its multiplicity

holds any hope.

The storm

has proven abortive

but we remain

after thoughts it

roused

to

re-cement our lives.

It is the mind

the mind

that must be cured
short of death's

intervention,

and the will becomes again
a garden. The poem

is complex and the place made
in our lives

for the poem

Silence can be complex too,

but you do not get far
with silence.

Begin again.

It is like Homer's
catalogue of ships:

it fills up the time.

I speak in figures,

well enough, the dresses

you wear are figures also,

we could not meet

otherwise! When I speak
of flowers
it is to recall
that at one time
we were young.

All women are not Helen,
I know that,
but have Helen in their hearts.

My sweet,
you have it also, therefore
I love you
and could not love you otherwise.

Imagine you saw
a field made up of women
all silver white.

What should you do
but love them?

The storm bursts
or fades! it is not
the end of the world.

Love is something else,
or so I thought it,
a garden which expands,
though I knew you as a woman
and never thought
otherwise,
until the whole sea
has been taken up
and all its gardens.

It was the love of (love),
the love that swallows up all else,
a grateful love,
a love of nature, of people,
of animals,
a love engendering
gentleness and goodness
that moved me
and that I saw in you.

I should have known,
though I did not,

that the lily-of-the-valley
is a flower makes many ill
who whiff it.

We had our children,
rivals in the general onslaught.
I put them aside
though I cared for them,
as well as any man
could care for his children
according to my lights.

You understand
I had to meet you
after the event
and have still to meet you.

Love
to which you too shall
bow
along with me—
a flower
a-weakest flower

shall be our trust
and not because
we are too feeble
to do otherwise

but because

at the height of my power
I risked what I had to do,
therefore to prove
that we love each other
while my very bones sweated
that I could not cry to you
in the act.

Of asphodel, that greeny flower,

I come, my sweet,

to sing to you!

My heart rouses

thinking to bring you news
of something

that concerns you

and concerns many men. Look at

what passes for the new,
You will not find it there but in
despised poems.

It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there.

Hear me out
for I too am concerned
and every man
who wants to die at peace in his
bed
besides.