

## Iris returning after five mostly wasted years

Those hours in october sun  
talking across cool shorn grass  
    that she lay upon  
    so I had to brush the dead leaves  
        off her back  
the fine yellow knit relinquishing  
    the last umber crumblings  
        under the spangling light  
pouring through  
    like confetti around her  
    and slowly down her—  
I was so lost in her  
    my I.D. cards could have been  
        waterfalling around me  
*no one, no one, no one*  
                                  *is like this—*  
but I didn't know how much  
    I didn't know—

Years later  
    our words have sharpened into glass  
        prisms that splinter the sun  
no more like us  
    than faces through a kaleidoscope

*but we were there once—*

I look up— the sky opens  
apathy goes farther through the mind  
    than any memory  
a car's Doppler revs past  
    chromed and painted roaring  
a siren punctuates  
    a mounted policeman's  
        asphalt-iron horseshoe rhythm  
a man singing badly bumbles past  
a bird from a near branch warbles  
somewhere the karmic baggage  
    of previous deaths  
        slightly lessens—  
*Will I ever be released?*  
    *Have I always been free?*

Out of her blues she called to say

*"I'm sorry I tried to...  
I just couldn't stand it."*

I barely breathe     can't speak—  
what if every unsaid word  
when the soul breaks through or loves  
is as tactless as every curse  
all the blame     each mistake?  
She pleaded, "*Can I see you?*"

It was so long between too few and far—  
too late to remember who should  
forgive who for what—

*"Why did this have to take so long?"*

*"How could it not?..."*

It took five years     *"and one early morning hour—"*  
before the April day  
when only robins, sparrows  
and peewits sang  
lightening the walk along endlessly rusting tracks  
under a mile-long freight chain  
abandoned mammoth husks  
leading far from the highway  
the houses     their voices  
where untrimmed limbs  
hemmed us in closer  
curling above the train  
an arch of candy-light green  
with yellow-white light dabbling  
the tall grasses where you sat  
white buds and blossoms there  
like someone blowing on your face  
to wake you  
your eyes glimmering  
after so long

*"when I remembered*

—five mostly wasted years

*how my overdose hurt you*

out of touch

*it stung through me*

with half our lives—

*like the stench of burning plastic—*

we came to this

*I could barely stand to....*

clear running creek's

*until one early morning*

rocky base's treble splash

down a long steep drop  
through thin brown boughs  
and mossy half-downed logs—  
that day you listened  
uncritically to the birdsongs  
ashamed of craving artifice at all  
your eyes unable to rise  
but still asking the grass (or gravel)  
till the air filled with your asking  
and I had to say  
what no one had—  
*“I forgive you  
for what you did  
to you, and me....”*

Then you were quaking  
in furious spasms  
silently as scared children do—  
and it took so long before you broke  
inhaled sharply  
wailed      clung to  
your dress  
like a tilled field’s  
soft earth

*when the city was becalmed  
like shivering leaves and  
I saw the shimmer rising  
around the buildings—  
then the sun breaking through  
painted each thing into life  
as indestructible  
as the light bearing  
each form into the world—  
how I loved each thing  
like a soul  
and learned its mercy....  
but even then I still felt  
I was never forgiven.  
I still needed you to—”*

*at last, to grip  
my soul by its  
collar—  
I loved  
to know  
love, its long  
white wafer-thin  
ring*

where the first drops  
ping on the few flat stones  
before thunder erupts  
through the wide sky  
with the long rain  
soaking and shifting  
the rivulets of spring—  
A higher wind carried  
straggler voices  
behind us  
taunting you  
even then—  
and I heard the air move  
across the tendrils  
noticed how  
branches reached out  
while scuttering leaves  
tumbled over  
the ties of tracks—  
You lifted your face  
the mask of self-  
inflicted histories  
a shed chrysalis—

*opening  
down my neck  
like a paper halo—  
my soul  
around me  
opened  
its empty arms,  
pressed me  
in recesses  
of white  
where I  
kneeled crying  
like a girl  
wrapped in flutters  
of the flailing soul—  
the secret body  
(an inner self)  
waded outwards  
through rivers  
washing me until  
the soul  
could hold the flesh  
made of  
woman*

Your hair was wet,  
the shame that masked your youth had vanished  
as though it had never seared you,  
or as though a gentle rain  
had salved a drought to the roots  
and bathed every vein with the liquor  
that urges rebirth  
with winds exhaling through every field,  
each tender shoot swelling towards the light  
ramming past the crusty loam  
to sense the whole horizon  
through one gleaming leaf  
unfolding for the returning sun—  
your eyes at last filled  
with their own ember light.