

eyes caught hold of a strange sight; for about a quarter of a mile down the road, cars had veered off to the side. Quickly, we lowered the radio volume and waited for the passage of what we assumed to be an ambulance or police car. I began to think it must be something else when no siren or flashing light became evident. But what could it possibly be? The village had certainly not scheduled a parade for Wednesday evening, July 21st. Judy and I looked at each other and laughed that nervous laugh that came so easily when we were puzzled. The giggle faded and the uneasiness was almost tangible. The air became still and so did we.

At first it seemed like an ordinary sight; simply an ordinary army convoy. Of course, we had seen them before, and we had always waved or honked. This time, perhaps because of our mood, we did not. The first nine or ten vehicles were jeeps occupied by what we guessed to be officers. They, in turn, were followed by trucks of regular soldiers. Everything seemed quite normal, except for its tremendous length, and we passed it off as nothing unusual until the radio informed us differently. "At 10:00 tonight Mayor Locker ordered the National Guard into the racially torn Hough area. The troops are thought to be on their way into the city at the present time."

*what Agnes Simmons said  
when they told her it was cancer  
Nancy Baxter*

It isn't the gray certainty of it that I mind  
 No—I've always known He lurked there silent,  
 Hiding behind the sunroom Boston Ferns.  
 He inched out just a little at a time  
 Like that game the children played, Mother May I.  
 Sometimes he took a baby step  
 When Papa died; that day the wind blew limbs  
 Across the pall bearers' path. Rain blurred their tracks.  
 Sometimes a giant step; Arlen came home  
 From war his mind a scrambled sewing box.  
 They closed the door, and he makes baskets now.

Baby step, giant step, sweet Jesus are you there?  
They took the baby to a place where he could sit and stare.

I thought I'd scared Him back a pace or two  
When Anabella married. She came down  
The parlor stairs like they were Jacob's ladder  
In a floating cloud of white and lilac.  
It was May, and Willie's eyes devoured her.  
We ate sherbet off the black glass plates.  
The day that she came home her father cried.  
I don't know why a baby not yet born  
Should have to die because a man was wild.

Baby step, giant step, sweet Jesus are you there?  
He came into the parlor, then, beside the Morris chair.

Hilda was my little homely bird  
With a look like a blue jay quizzing an elm.  
Forty she was when Sam made up his mind  
To dine from all the leavings of the rest,  
And she was willing fare. In just a year  
He sat beside the slag pit, black and cold,  
And thought of life and how his Vulture Mine  
And all the coal mines soon were going to close.  
He took a gun and put it to his head.  
I held his bride all night and crooned to her  
Right in His face; He stood outside and laughed.

Baby step, giant step, sweet Jesus are you there?  
She seemed a child again and not a dead man's scorned fare.

And now He waits outside my bedroom door  
I shouldn't care; my ties that bind are cut.  
The state has two and "Peaceful Hill" the rest.  
And yet, I swear I'd live it all again,  
For just one day, one longtime Maytime glance  
At Annabella clad in clouds and lilacs.

## II

In spite of all the sours, oh Life,  
(That) you have dished me up for all  
The breakfasts and the suppers of my days,  
I still will miss your many gushing sweets:

The cottonwood that snows and sifts  
And swirls to earth without a sound,  
The creamy orange rising moon  
Within the window's shadowed frame  
The taste of snow,  
The tight fist of a violet bud  
Curling within its April leaf  
The velvetness of moth wingfuzz  
And fearsome coffin chill in fall  
When barearmed you run toward the house  
With something nameless at your heels,

And strong and throbbing sound,  
Beethoven clang and Mozart tinkle  
And vibrations from Eva Tanguaay  
To each dark ear behind the gangway  
At Keith's.

And children hum at summer dusk  
And candle whisper Silent Night  
And throat split, cool-dawn Hosanna.

And I will miss a baby's sleep-eyed look  
Sleepy, nap fresh, padding down,  
And rusty lily pollen smearing  
Itself all over skirt and hands  
In frantic fruitful orgy,  
And warm peach fuzz,  
And the breathless sweetness of being waked  
So many times that way  
One sultry, dreamlike wedding night,  
And blue, past-all-price birthblood.

And dog bark and ant rush and heat shimmer and coffee smell  
And kiss breath and ice cold and fur feel and tree shade  
And silk sleek and rug shock and morning joy and dream fright  
And old book smell and rainbowshine and dewlight  
And if the supernal beauty is going to equal half  
What we have here,  
It will have to go some.