II. Many arrivals make us live: the tree becoming
Green, a bird tipping the topmost bough,
A seed pushing itself beyond itself . . .
What does what it should do needs nothing more.
The body moves, though slowly, toward desire.
We come to something without knowing why.

--Theodore Roethke, The Manifestation
Rose slept in my lap as John sped silently past the many small hotels and tourist attractions. It was November, and a cold New England rain fell steadily on the car. The world outside the car seemed so forbidding. I felt defeated before I had even begun. I was not sure why I wanted to come back. It had been five long heartbreaking years since I walked out. Neither my parents nor I had tried to communicate with the other. Why was I doing this? To say I was sorry. No, I was not sorry for what I had done. Perhaps, though, I was sorry for the pain I inflicted.

I tried to call my parents earlier in the evening, but there was no answer. I dared not write or call sooner, knowing that I would have been flatly refused. Their rejection might have kept me away for the rest of my life. But I wanted Rose to know her grandparents before she was too old. It was not fair to keep her away from them. A child needed grandparents, and I was not going to let my foolish pride keep her away from them.

Rose stirred a little in her sleep and brought me out of my thoughts. Her small gray eyes opened as she murmured, "Mama." "It's okay, Honey. I'm here." I brushed some of her silky blond strands away from her face. She was a beautiful child, always smiling and laughing with sparkling gray eyes. She had her grandfather's eyes. I wondered if he would notice. I drew her closer to me and breathed, "I love you, Rose."

A small smile drew across her face, "I know, Mama." She settled her head against my shoulder and drifted off again. The car was silent, and I tried to sleep but could not. As we drew closer to my home town, I became very apprehensive. I reached over to touch my husband John's hand. He squeezed my hand. He knew my feelings well, especially on this subject. I saw that he was tired. I hoped we would at least be able to sleep at my parents' home. We were low on money, after a vacation south; and it was unlikely that any of these small inns would cash a check.

We rounded the bend, and there stood the house where I spent the first nineteen years of my life. It was large and off the road a way. The large oaks that surrounded the house made it seem very solemn on such a dark night. A light burned in the study. My father would be up. I prayed that my mother would be asleep. It would be better if she saw me in the morning.
I sat in the car, unaware that John had turned off the car and now sat looking at me.

"Meg?"

"What? Oh, John..." I cried urgently.

"I know," he whispered gently. "Don't worry. They are only your parents. They still love you. They could never stop, just as you will always love Rose."

He was right. I learned when I became a mother that being a parent had its ups and downs, but you never stop loving your children.

"Let's go," I said.

My heart skipped a beat when I pushed the doorbell. The minutes seemed like years; and when I finally heard footsteps, I wanted to run away. I don't know what it was that kept me on the front steps. Finally, the thick door opened and my father peered through the screen.

"Yes. Can I help you?"

"Daddy?" I had wanted to sound firm, but instead I squeaked.

"Meg?" Dad asked. He opened the screen and shouted, "Meg! What are you doing...come in." He opened his arms, and I ran into them. He kissed my forehead then held me out to look at me.

"Oh, God, it's been so long...What a surprise...I've missed you...You look...I mean...I must tell your mother."

"No. Oh Dad," I tried to say; but it was too late. He had already called my mother.

"Who's at the door, dear?" she called as she came through the kitchen door. As I turned, I saw her surprised face fill with hatred.

"Ruth," my father excitedly exclaimed. "It's your daughter, Meg."

I looked into her face. I could see that she still remembered the fight and why I had left. She didn't even look at John, but she glanced at Rose. Rose awakened in the excitement and rubbed her eyes with her tiny hands. When she couldn't look at Rose any longer, she turned to her husband. "She may be your daughter, but she isn't mine." Then she turned to me. "You're welcome to stay the night. I don't want to see anyone out in that weather. I would appreciate it if you left early tomorrow."

"Ruth..." my father started.

"Don't say anything, George. I have my mind made up." And with that, my mother turned and stalked out of the room.

After that, things were quiet. John went out to the car and got our traveling bags. I took Rose up to my old room. The room was just as I had left it that warm May evening. My parents had not touched a thing. Then I realized they knew all these years that I would return.

Rose had already fallen asleep on my old bed by the time John arrived with the bags. He helped me put Rose's pajamas on, because I was shaking too badly to do it myself. After we tucked Rose in her bed, John held me.

When I regained my composure, we silently crept down the stairs. He walked me to the door of my father's study, where I was sure my father would be, and kissed me softly. As I knocked on the door, John started up the stairs. He knew I needed to be alone with my father. My father smiled as he opened the door. I looked toward John as he stood on the landing. He winked, and I was no longer scared.

Sitting in the huge leather chair, I felt secure. My father and I talked for hours and hours. We spoke of my life, and of his and Mother's. I told him all about Rose and John. I explained to him that I learned a great deal since I left.
"Motherhood," I explained, "allowed me to realize why you as parents did the things you did. I can't say I am sorry for leaving, because all I can see is the good from it. God didn't damn me for leaving like Mama wanted, Daddy. He blessed me with a beautiful daughter and a terrific husband. Dad, I never wanted to hurt you or Mama, but, well, please don't let Mama hate me."

"She doesn't hate you. She's been waiting a very long time for you to return. You'll see. You know as well as I that she just needed time. I think she's had enough time. Listen, it's late. Go up and get some rest. You look exhausted. Things will be better in the morning."

I got up to leave. When I reached the door, I turned. "Daddy, I love you."

"I know," he said. "I love you, too."

When I awoke the next morning, I found the sun shining brightly through the guestroom window. I slipped out of John's arms, fastened a robe around myself, and stepped into the hallway. When I reached the stairs, I heard laughter. I could not imagine who it could be, so I assumed Rose found the television. After I descended the stairs, I realized that the sounds were not coming from the family room where the television had always been. It was coming from the kitchen. I entered the kitchen and saw my mother and my daughter laughing together. When they discovered I was in the room, Rose ran up to me.

"This is my grandma, Mommy," Rose boasted to me. "She said so."

I looked up to find my mother smiling affectionately at me.

"Come in, dear, and join us."

I walked over to my mother and hugged her. Rose joined in, holding my legs. After our embrace, my mother whispered to me.

"Meg, I don't know what to say."

I looked at her and smiled. "Try, 'I love you,' Mom." She smiled. "I love you."

I reached for her hand. "Me too, Mom."

Rose, after being ignored much too long, tugged on my robe and asked, "What 'bout me?"

My mother laughed, picked up Rose, and tickled her. "Of course, we love you too, honey. Who couldn't help but love such a terrific little granddaughter." Then she glanced at me.

"Or such a wonderful daughter."