

Attending the Opera

I hear a piece by Wagner,
Or Strauss,
Or Verdi,

And I am 9 years old,
Riding in the back seat of the car
Into the city,
Mom and Dad in the front seat;
And we're dressed in our
Very best clothes,
The ones that hang in the closet all year
Waiting for a night like this
When little girls pretend
That they can grow up
and be princesses.
We're going
To the opera.

And because I am only 9,
I don't care that we go in the side door,
And sneak in with Tom,
Our usher-friend,
Before the people who paid come in.

And I don't notice
That we are the only people sitting on the stairs.
At intermission,
When Tom whispers to my father
And we troop down
Through the crowds of elegant dresses
And important conversations,
Down to the main floor,
To the empty seats that someone paid for,
But no one claimed,
I don't realize that
We don't belong there.
I don't notice the turning heads
Or all the eyes looking,
Forming their opinions of us,
Whatever they may be.
I notice Wagner,
and Strauss,
and Verdi.
I know them better
Than I know these faces.

We drive home;
Now Tom is in front with Dad,
And I lean against Mom
And listen to grown-up conversations
With only half an ear,
Until the evening overtakes me
And I fall asleep against my mother
Dreaming
That I can grow up
And be a princess.

--Karen Sasveld