

DEER SEASON

November, late afternoon. I'm driving fast,
only the parking lights on.
A minor infringement of the law. . . .

All along Route 4 men wearing orange
step out of the woods after a day
of hunting, their rifles pointed
toward the ground.

The sky turns red, then
purple in the west, and the luminous
birches lean over the narrow macadam road.

I cross the little bridge
near the pool called The Pork Barrel,
where the best fishing is,
and pass the Fentons' farm—the windows
of the milking parlor bright, the great
silver cooling tank beginning to chill the milk.

I've seen the veal calves drink from pails
in their stalls. Suppose even the ear of wheat
suffers in the mill. . . .
Driving fast in my car at dusk
I plan our evening meal.

THE HERMIT

The meeting ran needlessly late,
and while yawns were suppressed around the room
the river swelled until it spilled.
When the speaker finished, I made for the car
and home as fast as fog would allow—
until I came upon a barricade: beyond,
black pools eddied over the road. Detour.
The last familiar thing I saw—the steaming
heaps of bark beside the lumber mill.

No other cars on the narrow, icy lane; no house
or barn for miles, until the lights of a Christmas tree
shone from the small windows of a trailer.
And then I knew I couldn't be far
from the East Village and the main road.
I was terribly wide awake. . . .

To calm myself I thought of drinking water
at the kitchen sink, in the circle of light
the little red lamp makes in the evening. . .
of half-filling a second glass
and splashing it into the dish of white narcissus
growing on the sill. In China
this flower is called the hermit,
and people greet the turning of the year
with bowls of freshly-opened blossoms.

SUN AND MOON

for Donald Clark

Drugged and drowsy but not asleep
I heard my blind roommate's daughter
helping her with her meal:
"What's that? Squash?"
"No. It's spinach."

Back from a brain scan she dozed
to the sound of the Soaps: amnesia,
infidelity, shady business deals,
and long, white hospital halls. . . .
No separation between life and art.

I heard two nurses whispering;
Mr. Malcomson had died.
An hour later one of them came to say
that a private room was free.