

SHE WRITES A LETTER HOME

Dear mother, I am writing you a letter.
The paper is English, fine English linen.
England. The land of rains. There,
Shakespeare floats in his grave.
There Churchill is invaded at last;
He clenches his fist to the bone.
Under their grey lids of clouds,
The skies have shut their eyes. All day,

Tears squeeze through at the corners.
The spires are the first to catch it;
They spread it like a plague, calling it *grace*.
England is a sheet of wet paper;
The watermark hovers just under the ground,
A terrible tease.

This pen is called *Mont Blanc*.
It reminds me of Switzerland, its sleek alp teeth.
There the sky is always blue and clear
Like the fair Nordic eyes of the dead.
Here: I am drawing alps in the margin.
But how can it draw snowy mountains
In its terrible ink?
They are bordered in black, like a grave card,
The funereal alps. Little white skiers
Slide down the great ash peaks right into your lap.

I would like to come home.
Are you still starching the flowers?
Here, too, everything is starched
But there are no flowers at all.
My face is starched like a flower, a single petal,
Holding on for dear life, the worm holes of eyes,
The great teeth blight, the starched stem.
(Did you know they drill in me, like earth?)
The nipples are thorns.
I will not mention my nails.

Are you still ironing out my brothers and sisters?
Are they as smooth as they were?
I am white as a white paper sheet.
The nurse comes in here with her iron;
She plugs it in; she picks up my arm
And says the sleeves are the hardest,
The corners are hardest to get at.
You cannot imagine how I fear that triangle of flame.

When you work, do you still wear a kerchief
To keep the hair out of your eyes? The weather is fine.
I hope you will come and see how neat I am,
Folded and clean, like a handkerchief,
(Though nobody cries here)
All edges, all white edges.

Susan Fromberg Schaeffer

NIGHT WITH STARS

Now the day has rolled itself back
From the blank face of the sky
Flesh, white flesh,
Exposing the sockets of stars.

They are sucking the dreams
Out of skulls, the flesh-covered skulls
Creating a mist, a phosphorescence,
Spreading out finely, like sand.

The great hills funnel down the road
Black breasts outlined in silver,
The cold wet breaths of the dead.
The houses are tiny, and clumping together