

Roses

During the night of fever, as she lay
 Between an exhausted wakefulness and sleep,
 I sat beside her fearfully, in dismay
 When her slow breathing would become so deep
 It seemed that she might slip beyond recall.
 Then I would touch her; then she would revive;
 Then, when her eyelids opened and a small
 Smile would greet me, hope would come alive.
 With morning, the ordeal was over. Gone
 Was every trace of illness. A soft rain
 Had swept across the countryside at dawn,
 So even our garden was made fresh again.
 Then Janet went among our roses where
 She and the roses shone in luminous air.

I Am Just the Same

*I am just the same as when
 Our days were a joy, and our paths through flowers.*

THOMAS HARDY

A world in pieces with the loved one gone.
 The garden failing and the house a chill.
 The bedroom a despair to look upon,
 With flowers dying at the window sill.
 Pictures of the places where no more
 Two can be two are desolate in their frames.
 The faithless clock ticks as it ticked before
 They met in love and vowed to join their names.
 Gazing about, he feels the urgent force
 Of recent wishes rise up when her name
 Comes to his lips, as though that great divorce
 Had never happened. "I am just the same,"
 He wants to tell her, passionately; "I lack
 Youth only—and the hope to have you back."

THOMAS CARPER

FROM

1991

Fiddle Lane

Turning in Bed

The stench of early cruelty returns
As I, a child, crouch underneath low boughs
Playing with candles. In small pans the worms
Writhe. Now I grow, and from a neighbor's house
He runs at me, screaming that I have hid
His toy gun, which I get and, with a blow
That terrifies me, smash it to his head,
Causing blood and my blinding tears to flow.
The picture breaks. I ache. The sheets are taut.
I turn for comfort, then return to hell,
Fleeing across a fiery space and caught
By images assaulting me until
I fear I will not wake again, but keep
Revolving painfully on the spit of sleep.

II THOMAS CARPER

That's a Nice Leg

She's nine and worries. That midsummer day
We who were guests had left the dining room
After breakfast, a few had gone to play
Tennis, and I was thinking of a swim.
Lisa had her suit on, and was standing
Next to me, so we talked. "You've been here often?"
"Just twice." "Will you be going to the landing?"
"When Mommy comes." Perhaps my voice did soften
When I said, "That's a nice lake," for she heard
"A nice leg," and with ages-old concern
Pressed hers, and declared it fat. My word,
"Lake," repeated, caused her eyes to turn
Downward—as though a blossom could be bent
On closing from its own embarrassment.