

the lambs

the love that is most unforeseen,
unpreventable, incorrect,
rains around you
like fog exploding into blossoms
like slow-motion bombs
erasing a city's streets
(in the time of love that was never a place)
yet she comes, the love
before you can discriminate
or even discern who or what
to love
let alone how—

At first
you love the lamb you feed as a child
nursing its plump musk warmth,
a baby bottle in its hungry mouth
dribbling milk across the glaciers
of soiled newspapers
where you slide and run across
the whole basement floor
chasing his bright wool,
but then you never foresee
the night you ask, "Where is he?"
and your mother will show you
guts in a freezer bag
pressing your hand on to the frost,
stinging your skin with its blood ice
making you cry
tears that splash
into lenses in that snow
showing through the plastic
the blood, body and screams of—

"Where is he?"

"We slaughtered him— This is him."

"But, you can't— you can't!"

"We did— it's done! He's dead! he's dead!"

There was a fall
before that winter's broken tongues
when we ran with our lambs
(they were brothers)
before mine was also killed
and your mother almost hit me for crying—
if only that fall came again
or comes again—
if only there were a Someday to come
when we could—
if only...

I heard the ghost coo out
over a woman's silent sleeping
I heard her husband's even breathing
and I was in another child's bed (yours?)
just a thin door away
where I worried into sleep
no shouting, screaming, laughing
not even tree leaves rattling
or beams creaking
no sound
but her cooing crying
piercing and sighing
making the darkness into endless fields
of the bones of air-raid evacuees,
but dawn with its running waters
ringing machines and revving motors
over the hills flaring green and icy mirrors
to the frostlight-sun came
and I saw the sheep rising to a standstill
still damp with dew
drugged on their feet
like ancient addicts staring,
but I can only think of them
as if they were
still promised
the milk of infancy.

In a train's cafe car
a drunk man takes my hand,
timid at first, but he ventures,
"Brother, you a minority— 'm a minority,
we both God's. We *all* God's.
He made us—*all* o' us..."
He laughs but his wife doesn't,
I'm afraid he may cry right there
but the train rocks and he knocks
his beer over the table.
He dodges the dripping puddle;
I hand over a fistful of napkins.

So many years have slid by
I can't tell you anymore
what happened or why;
I only remember
once there was a time of love
(though never a place)
when we weren't just islands
in the sea of newspapers
but children nursing animals
and animals cradling innocents.
There is no knowing in the end
but *what* we love,
and the fact *that* we love
escapes us...

that is
until she comes again,
the love that grieves
to such extremes
her sky is a rapture of pain
—like mary's over a forgotten god—
her rain erasing
every once-beautiful
thing of earth
but one.