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Entering the Garden

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ENTERING THE GARDEN

As you are climbing the path between the two fields,
Threading your way upwards, among the yellow and red flowers,
You see her smiling, waving and urging you on

And suddenly you're afraid: entering the garden to be photographed,
Finally exposed, the secret of your true self
Revealed to everyone, nervous Narcissa caught

In the plain mirror of a sister's eye,
Of course you are uneasy: what if the camera should see
Something it should not see? Really, this is too naked

And too fast: the truth lies only *between* moments,
Or so you say to yourself, holding your breath, listening to it
In the wet cave of the lungs hover, hesitate,

In stillnesses only you have experienced:
Nevertheless you agreed to this, you try
To appear comfortable, you arrange yourself and sit down

As naturally as possible, giving her your brightest smile
You stare back at your accomplice, the young woman crouched behind the
tripod
With the black sheaf of her hair trailing its loose fingers

Over the high cheekbones and around the glass eye
Of the camera she hides behind, strange five legged bird
Tap tapping at the pale window of a day

You look anxiously out of, aware only of your own
Possible reflection in the smooth platter of the lens
Opposite you, the dazzling twin countenance

You would not disturb for anything, you wait to be shown
Not only yourself, but the world trapped in your mind's eye,
Imagining your own image in the concentric glass circles

Of the air that cages you, bewitched, sitting there like a lump
Still as a statue, unable to move
One inch for fear of losing the live face

You put on so carefully this morning, but what *is* this waxy trance,
This artificially still pallor? One slightest touch
Could utterly change the picture, could break you

And the camera too, into jittering jigsaw pieces,
And you know it, but this is not *nature morte*, the streaming
Corruscating surface of things moves constantly

And to catch it so must she, with her forehead like snow on the mountain,
Peacefully, draping her tall body nonchalantly
All over the camera like a bolt of fine cotton,

For though she is only human, though even those luminous cheeks
Can wrinkle themselves into the ugly cross hatches of the shadow
Of ordinary petulance, of everyday cranky complaints,

Right now she is willowy, the white sail of her smile
Swoops out over her supple frame as if she were a mast
Leaning and bending with you, over a genial sea,

And little by little you let go, slowly you begin
Not quite forgetting yourself, but at least
Noticing other things, sunlight coming and going like minnows

Flickering over the sparse grass, the gawky arthritic sticks
Of flowering mesquite, the fringed peppertrees swaying,
The little pungent blossoms shivering,

Sprinkling the whole valley with their white spiciness
Until you begin to move too, to speak to her at last,
Even, cautiously, to look outside the garden,

And instantly the spell is broken, in a shimmer of crystal,
That spell that was of death, the dead center, the I,
Is shattered now, in a hundred leaping prisms,

Suddenly you look at the far mountains
With her, the camera begins to click
Faster and faster, tap tapping at your head as if there were nobody at home

Which there probably isn't, but even if you have fled
Eerily, to the bottom of the next river,
What may not happen, from moment to moment,

In the swift current speckled, among the fragmented forms flowing
Through ribbons of light and shadow, matter in waves like water,
The entire tight knot of your being may splinter

Into a thousand tiny freckles scattered
Over the shaggy marigolds, twigs from the trees, nasturtiums,
Seeds in the air, your friend's feet, even the black ants on the ground,

So that now, finally, your held breath may relax,
Light as the chill breezes of morning coming and going
But painfully also, almost too transparent

And too excruciatingly fine for comfort,
Flashing in and out like the thin leaves of the peppertrees
Over the glass ladder of day, the scales that have fallen shining.