

Sing Something Simple

The smell of ironing on a wet afternoon
the smell of the first lawnmowing in the summer
the smell of cow's breath in the shed
the smell of whiskey on my father's breath
the breathing of the animals and the birds in the dark
the smells that carry me past the beams and boards of time

The scent on my mother's collar long after it was worn
the smell of cakes rising in the oven
the damp warm smell of bathroom air on a Sunday night
as my father emerges from his weekly visit, house dark
or only dimly lit, and the radio says *Sing Something Simple*
and there's cold meat and pickled cabbage for supper.
The smell of fires lit in the early morning, of Sunday pork roasting.

The fires of love, of hatred, and of memory --
My mother's hands as she was dying
like nothing I had smelt on her before, a sweet smell
on my hands as I drove home from another day
in her receding company. The ersatz sweet smell
of the home that assaulted me each visit,
my panic rising at what I would find
as I walked over the thick pink carpet to her room.

Smell me back to the kitchen as the windows steam up, yellow-framed,
keeping out the endless rain. Perch me on the arm of my father's chair
so I can watch the iron move, or see the column of ash, about to fall
into the cake mix, deftly scooped up and thrown into the fire.
The grass breaking under my feet as it reaches into spring,
Cough sweets in the bedside table, and I'm unbound, flying --
the tin caddy still holds inside the stale reek of real tea.