

you are one of *them*.  
*Why* should you be one, too?  
 I scarcely dared to look.  
 to see what it was I was. 65  
 I gave a sidelong glance  
 —I couldn't look any higher—  
 at shadowy gray knees,  
 trousers and skirts and boots  
 and different pairs of hands 70  
 lying under the lamps.  
 I knew that nothing stranger  
 had ever happened, that nothing  
 stranger could ever happen.  
 Why should I be my aunt, 75  
 or me, or anyone?  
 What similarities—  
 boots, hands, the family voice  
 I felt in my throat, or even  
 the *National Geographic* 80  
 and those awful hanging breasts—  
 held us all together  
 or made us all just one?  
 How—I didn't know any  
 word for it—how “unlikely” . . . 85  
 How had I come to be here,  
 like them, and overhear  
 a cry of pain that could have  
 got loud and worse but hadn't?

The waiting room was bright 90  
 and too hot. It was sliding  
 beneath a big black wave,  
 another, and another.

Then I was back in it.  
 The War was on. Outside, 95  
 in Worcester, Massachusetts,  
 were night and slush and cold,  
 and it was still the fifth  
 of February, 1918.

1976

## The Moose

for Grace Bulmer Bowers

From narrow provinces  
 of fish and bread and tea,  
 home of the long tides

where the bay leaves the sea  
twice a day and takes  
the herrings long rides, 5

where if the river  
enters or retreats  
in a wall of brown foam  
depends on if it meets 10  
the bay coming in,  
the bay not at home;

where, silted red,  
sometimes the sun sets  
facing a red sea, 15  
and others, veins the flats'  
lavender, rich mud  
in burning rivulets;

on red, gravelly roads,  
down rows of sugar maples,  
past clapboard farmhouses 20  
and neat, clapboard churches,  
bleached, ridged as clamshells,  
past twin silver birches,

through late afternoon 25  
a bus journeys west,  
the windshield flashing pink,  
pink glancing off of metal,  
brushing the dented flank  
of blue, beat-up enamel; 30

down hollows, up rises,  
and waits, patient, while  
a lone traveller gives  
kisses and embraces  
to seven relatives 35  
and a collie supervises.

Goodbye to the elms,  
to the farm, to the dog.  
The bus starts. The light  
grows richer; the fog, 40  
shifting, salty, thin,  
comes closing in.

Its cold, round crystals  
form and slide and settle  
in the white hens' feathers, 45  
in gray glazed cabbages,  
on the cabbage roses  
and lupins like apostles;

the sweet peas cling  
to their wet white string 50  
on the whitewashed fences;  
bumblebees creep  
inside the foxgloves,  
and evening commences.

One stop at Bass River. 55  
Then the Economies—  
Lower, Middle, Upper;  
Five Islands, Five Houses,<sup>1</sup>  
where a woman shakes a tablecloth  
out after supper. 60

A pale flickering. Gone.  
The Tantramar marshes  
and the smell of salt hay.  
An iron bridge trembles  
and a loose plank rattles 65  
but doesn't give way.

On the left, a red light  
swims through the dark:  
a ship's port lantern.  
Two rubber boots show, 70  
illuminated, solemn.  
A dog gives one bark.

A woman climbs in  
with two market bags,  
brisk, freckled, elderly. 75  
"A grand night. Yes, sir,  
all the way to Boston."  
She regards us amicably.

Moonlight as we enter  
the New Brunswick woods, 80  
hairy, scratchy, splintery;  
moonlight and mist  
caught in them like lamb's wool  
on bushes in a pasture.

The passengers lie back. 85  
Snores. Some long sighs.  
A dreamy divagation  
begins in the night,  
a gentle, auditory,  
slow hallucination. . . . 90

1. These are small towns and villages in Nova Scotia, near Halifax.

In the creakings and noises,  
 an old conversation  
 —not concerning us,  
 but recognizable, somewhere,  
 back in the bus: 95  
 Grandparents' voices

uninterruptedly  
 talking, in Eternity:  
 names being mentioned,  
 things cleared up finally; 100  
 what he said, what she said,  
 who got pensioned;

deaths, deaths and sicknesses;  
 the year he remarried;  
 the year (something) happened. 105  
 She died in childbirth.  
 That was the son lost  
 when the schooner foundered.

He took to drink. Yes.  
 She went to the bad. 110  
 When Amos began to pray  
 even in the store and  
 finally the family had  
 to put him away.

“Yes . . .” that peculiar 115  
 affirmative. “Yes . . .”  
 A sharp, indrawn breath,  
 half groan, half acceptance,  
 that means “Life’s like that.  
 We know *it* (also death).” 120

Talking the way they talked  
 in the old featherbed,  
 peacefully, on and on,  
 dim lamplight in the hall,  
 down in the kitchen, the dog 125  
 tucked in her shawl.

Now, it’s all right now  
 even to fall asleep  
 just as on all those nights.  
 —Suddenly the bus driver 130  
 stops with a jolt,  
 turns off his lights.

A moose has come out of  
 the impenetrable wood  
 and stands there, looms, rather, 135

in the middle of the road.  
It approaches; it sniffs at  
the bus's hot hood.

Towering, antlerless,  
high as a church, 140  
homely as a house  
(or, safe as houses).  
A man's voice assures us  
"Perfectly harmless . . ."

Some of the passengers 145  
exclaim in whispers,  
childishly, softly,  
"Sure are big creatures."  
"It's awful plain."  
"Look! It's a she!" 150

Taking her time,  
she looks the bus over,  
grand, otherworldly.  
Why, why do we feel  
(we all feel) this sweet 155  
sensation of joy?

"Curious creatures,"  
says our quiet driver,  
rolling his *r*'s.  
"Look at that, would you." 160  
Then he shifts gears.  
For a moment longer,

by craning backward,  
the moose can be seen  
on the moonlit macadam; 165  
then there's a dim  
smell of moose, an acrid  
smell of gasoline.

1976

## One Art

The art of losing isn't hard to master;  
so many things seem filled with the intent  
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster  
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent. 5  
The art of losing isn't hard to master.