

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,¹
 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.