

Notre Dame du Lac

1

Everywhere the same campus trees-
fifty autumns thicker, taller
and scheduled to sleeve their naked
bark in January's ermine.

A male and female cardinal
peck at huckleberries on a limb.

Paired for life, they beak
each berry as their last and first.

Sparrows cling to branches,
wires, sheer brick walls,
anything where they can roost.

A chipmunk scoots and pauses
by the numbers.

Unlike all peacock
prancers on parade or the zombie
stomp of soldiery, backpacking
students cycle, rollerblade
and stroll to their different drummers.

They pass like Giacometti's
striders- eyes full front
but aimed at destinations still
within themselves....

Beyond
Nantucket a jet's about to crash.
Bradley's challenging Gore.

Ted Hesburgh's fit and eighty-two
with one good eye.

“May I
serve God better with one eye
than I did with two.”

Seated
behind me at a football game,
a woman from Dallas tells me
her Pittsburgh mother had an uncle-
Leo O'Donnell, a doctor.

She knows
I've flown from Pittsburgh for the day.
Eighty thousand cheer around us.
“O'Donnell,” she repeats.

I swallow
and say that Dr. O'Donnell funded
“my scholarship to study here”
a half-century ago.

The odds
are eighty thousand plus to one
that I should meet his Texas niece
today in this crammed stadium
in Indiana, but I do.

What else
is there to say?

It's now
all over the world.

Everything's
happening.

Anything can happen.

2

We've journeyed back to grass
and souvenirs and beige bricks.

The sky's exactly the same.

Acre by acre, the campus
widens like a stage designed
for a new play.

Why

do we gawk like foreigners
at residence halls no longer
ours but somehow ours
in perpetuity?

We visit them

like their alumni- older
but unchanged.

Half a century

of students intervenes.

They stroll

among us now, invisible
but present as the air before
they fade and disappear.

It's like

the day we swam St. Joseph's
Lake.

We churned the surface
into suds with every stroke and kick.

After we crossed, the water
stilled and settled to a sheen
as if we never swam at all.

One memory was all we kept
to prove we'd been together
in that very lake, and swimming.

Each time we tell this story,
someone says we're living out
a dream.

 We say we're only
reuniting with the lives
we lived.

 As long as we
can say they were, they *were*...

And what they were, we are.