

## To My Mother

Had you survived that August afternoon  
of Bright's Disease, you would be sixty-three,  
and I would not be rummaging for words  
to plot or rhyme what I would speak to you.

Tonight I found a diary you kept  
in nineteen twenty-eight, and while I read  
your script in English, Arabic, and Greek,  
I grudged those perished years and nearly wept

and cursed whatever god I often curse  
because I scarcely knew one day with you  
or heard you sing or call me by my name.

I know you were a teacher and a nurse

and sang at all the summer festivals.

You made one scratched recording of a song

I often play when no one else is home,

but that is all I have to keep you real.

The rest exists in fragile photographs,

a sudden memoir in my father's eyes

and all the anecdotes of thirty years

remembered like a portrait torn in half

and torn in half again until a word  
deciphered in a diary rejoins  
these tatters in my mind to form your face  
as magically as music overheard

can summon and assemble everything  
about a day we thought forever past.  
For one recovered second you are near.  
I almost hear you call me and sing

before the world recoils and returns...  
I have no monument, my beautiful,  
to offer you except these patterned lines.  
They cannot sound the silences that burn

and burn, although I try to say at last  
there lives beyond this treachery of words  
your life in me anew and in that peace  
where nothing is to come and nothing past.