

Crossing to Become

An artist? or simply, to be or not to be?

To be, as a kid, was happy
I think now.

Back then, reactions, mostly.
To a beautiful mother
Who was sound and movement, laughter, happiness and anger -
Big anger at times.
To a different country, language, people, animals.
To, above all, my father's peace. When he could be with me.

My parents, the artists.
My mother, the singer. She sang not in the kitchen, not at my bedside, no,
At the piano, on a stage, to an audience.
My father, the pianist, he played when he could, always quietly
And supreme, when he took leave, not often, from lifelong duties
As a doctor. He wrote – on medicine, mostly, and so many letters.
Letters to me. And the books, his books, my books, the ones he gave
To me.

To create! what? how? when?
Compose, paint, dance, sing, in
A studio, in the kitchen – !?

I watched and helped her cook when she did. She was passion
And here her passions were tamed (she loved to eat) and
There we were, cooking and laughing, later to sit and
To eat after all the wild production.
Together, ever after?

I wrote some things down then, second or third grade
Comp book scribbles, on horses, mostly.

Later, food in (Catholic) boarding school sucked.
Remember Vienna in the 70's was not yet Vienna in the 80's
Repolished to former splendor.
I came from the sunny South to a place so gray still, and small then.
Small post-war (heart) minded I felt. The nuns.

My grandmother, orderly nineteenth century soul, sad and alone.
Her queries about Cora turned me off. She could not have had
An idea. Still in love with her old monarch, regrets of a fallen empire,
Lost order, widowed between two wars, land, family lost. Her
Only daughter didn't fit in any, not even her finest *Kuchenformen*.
Oma was from such another time.
I had a best of 1960's New World TV blockhead on when I visited.
Caspar, Mannix, Sidney Poitier. My alter-granny lived in Beverly Hills.

In between all that – New York glam – where I was born. From there
I beamed out on my time warps; one way, the old South, the other,
Transatlantic. Again & again, decades in a triangle.

Re-actions. Always. Adjusting. My fate to be.

Much earlier in 1964.

It was after I crossed the sea the second time, and for once
New York was not clearing-house. Just skipped that time,
Records show.

Instead, New Orleans, my first port-of-call (I don't remember, pictures tell.)
The steamy sunny hot South. To our new home, big house, dogs. The dogs.
Daddy in a red sports car.
I think I felt right at home.

And then, that first -real- crossing, the inner kind, the kind that really counts.
Not travel not diversion. But more deeply felt inside. I remember that.
The wooden double doors. The white wooden double doors. The red brick building
I walked up to alone from my parents' car. I was four. I did not speak the language
Of the Clinton Baptist kindergarten. My mother explained I would now walk in there.
(different times, right?) My father quietly encouraged I do. I performed.
They say a little boy who was also going in alone opened the double doors for me.
(ah, for some Southern grace!)

I was in a new place, and there were many children. It was ok.
An only child, I am
Fortunate I came out on the social side.
I recall no cross-cultural communication problems.

Only one incident. The incident. The first – threshold to knowing.
She was small, blonde, like I. But she wore a brace on her upper body.
She didn't like me, I guess. Because, on that first day, I was definitely
From some. place. else.
She pushed me and held me fast against the wall – the cold metal pinching
Deep into my skin; the moments probably brief lasting an eternity.
And my innocence was lost.

My joy remains
to be or not to be -
an artist or not to be.

I don't know.

(I wish I could work marble like Michelangelo)