

AMERICAN RETROSPECTIVE



POEMS 1961-2016
Eleanor Rimoldi

Meditations in the Maternity Ward

I came, frightened and glad,
to wait out the long night:
aching for an end
to the heavy days.

Pale sisters hovered,
fluttering starchily,
until I lay alone,
placid in a white bed.

We women were left to it.
'All good sports here,' nurse clucked,
strutting through the ward.
And I, for one, would be strong.

But, for the second time,
the waves of pain went out,
indifferent as a tide—
the only pain I ever wanted.

All my courage remained,
a tense contraction
gripping my belly
with unused passion.

The morning embarrassed me.
Others had come and gone that night,
one, yelping down the corridor
like a hurt puppy:

like the spotted dog I had in Ohio,
crumpled by a truck,
whimpering as we drove

helpless to the vet.

In my revolutionary days,
all fired-up on Marx and Lenin,
I was left to stamp envelopes
and bake cakes for the Socialists.

A white liberal, listening
as Negro friends raged,
striking their fists into their hands;
I sat with my knitting in cool white hands.

On a sunline strung across the sky,
I hang a soft pastel layette:
while Asian children darkly scan the clouds,
waiting for jets.

Passive and mute I wait.
Between the conception and the creation
Falls the shadow—
maternity, ennui, or despair.

I am fevered with inaction
and want to bear some brave thing—
myself perhaps, or another
bolder generation.

Expatriate in Mount Eden

Against the snow
and concrete of New York,
lovers wander in the night
through Wall Street,
A sweet steam
hisses through subway grates
cooling into white fog.

But here, gardens bloom
like blowzy matrons,
roses enfold plump petals
and the wall tangles
with brainless ivy.

Yet within this old house,
memories stir like draughts.
I know this musty inherited air,
it hangs as heavy in houses
leaning along brick streets in Brooklyn.

These high-ceilinged halls
hoard generations
of the universal dead,
keeping the continuity.
Yours will do as well
as mine for that.

Outside, spiders on wet webs
lace artful prisons
across the windows
and the chimney is a trellis
for twisting vines,

paint flakes like bark,
grass brushes the floor boards.

Inside, my flowering bed
is full of restless children
curling against my sides
in the night—
their breath hushes the sighing ghosts.

In the glasshouse city,
a young man stares from his picture
window, ten stories down
to watch his mistress
move across Central Park,
her red cape blooming
through bare branches.

Between one life and another
the miles of doldrums grow.
Time drops a curtain of snow
over Times Square,
over its neon sunlight.

Excerpted from
American Retrospective
Poems 1961-2016
by Eleanor Rimoldi
ISBN 978-0-473-42208-0

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Hicksville Press
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ISBN 978-0-473-42208-0



Photograph: Patrick Reynolds