

Recalling Sarah

I'm moved to write to you
Whom I have never known
Whom I have always known.

How can it be? I am puzzled
By my own assurance
(I, who am assured about so little)
Over someone who died
Before I was born
And lived a world away.

I look at my creased, handed-down photo
Of your softly sepia'd twenty-year-old self
And wonder.
Your dark-eyed composure
Composes in turn my thoughts
There's poise in your posture
And challenge in the tilt of your head
A delicate sense of expectancy
As you look back through me and beyond
Towards a future that never really happened.

The parameters of disease
Marked out in the white-sheeted hospital bed
The tread of nurses, the clink of medicine bottles
And their hopeless ministrations, all this
A mere decade away.

Recalling Sarah, cont.

For now, though
You're all dressed up, bridal-like again
And oh, so elegant
A photo was no small occasion, then.
But in your eyes
(my father's eyes, my eyes)
Is a foreshadowing
Of space where
A life should have been.

When you coughed
Strawberry splashes
Through your handkerchief,

And sweated the night away
Awaking fatigued and heavy-lunged,
They knew.

You wept, as they took you away
The corridors of your memory
Running you back to when
You held your child's heartbeat close to yours
Not covered up, separated, segregated
Portioned off like something unclean.

And when they brought your son to visit
The nurses bit their lips
And kept him at a distance.
It was a cruel farewell.

I think
He never stopped missing you
And the missingness
Was passed down, and down.

And so your photo
Still sits in front of me
A haunting, present absence.

*Note: My grandmother passed away from pulmonary tuberculosis
in 1932. She was 33.*