

THE PARTING

Her room wasn't quite a hospital's.  
Sheets sown with nursinghome's brand  
weren't terminal. No sign spelt Infirmary.

Maid, maiden, old maid, she encouraged  
others to the patter of little feet.  
Perhaps she put the gleam in my father's eye  
that made me nephew. Possible. Probable.  
I, no son, although more son to her  
than to reluctant mother.

I knew the latest time I saw her would be the last.  
I'd not disagree on headlines or weather.  
Would comment on her room. Lovely.  
Would ask about meals, nurses, others.  
Would probe for the story of myself  
on a jetty with freshly caught fish  
I picked from creels, threw back to  
astonished looks of fishermen. Aged four.  
Now the day was beyond her memory, was  
even past recollection of the telling.

I tried again. She retold as always:  
myself greedy for a suitcase my own size  
but led to jumbo trunks too large by  
three times or four to my young eyes.  
I stamped my feet. My hands apart  
measured the distance of my determination.

She, I, we smiled at our melodrama.  
I knew when to exit. How to.  
Or thought I did. We kissed.  
As I turned to leave I knew  
my seventy-nine year old aunt knew  
I knew she'd tonguekissed me.