



STILL, LIFE

I dwell in a lonely house I know
that vanished many a summer ago,
And left no trace but the cellar walls,
And a cellar in which the daylight falls
And the purple-stemmed wild raspberries grow.

These are the basements — abasements of the homeless. These dwellings are not theirs. All the sad stagey bodies — who has arranged them this way? — will die: mother and father, lover and friend — Malerie's family — squatters who won't last. Material — even the houses — will live longer (the mites and dust motes of unused kitchens are already eternal). Pools of neighborly ultramarine — chalked-up sidewalks and useful garages — even lemon-scented fabric of clothing, mostly unseen, will be finished. Yet live so much longer... Mother, father, lover, friend — Malerie's mother, father, lover, friend — phantom roundelay. The cinderblock'd motel room shag and effete paneled houses are deadpan crypts. No: cenotaphs, for the bodies will not remain. There are trellises and bowers and atria of flowers soon to be ungrown then grown again, leaving only traces.

O'er ruined fences the grapevines shield
The woods come back to the mowing field;

Untitled

1998

selenium toned gelatin silver print

edition of 8

20 x 24 inches



The orchard tree has grown one copse
Of new wood and old where the woodpecker chops;
The footpath down to the well is healed.

Look in any window — hearthless habitat! — each a family album leaf — sleepy and hypervigilant, they're ready for the knife or the ether. This is not *The Ice Storm*. These are not mannequins. This is not a suburb: this is a contumelation — necropolis — ossuary. Haven't we had enough of suburbs?

I dwell with a strangely aching heart
In that vanished abode there far apart
On that disused and forgotten road
That has no dust-bath now for the toad.
Night comes; the black bats tumble and dart...

Still lives... they comb each other with their eyes — they comb the walls, they comb the air, they catacomb — but still we cannot have learned all we need to know of cliquish stares. Still we can't have enough of them and their beholders's tender tarpaulin of flesh: some stand soldiered, arms hung down, the lazy dead. Some, fresh-minted voyeurs, diletantes: they need time. Give them time! Too eager, they just can't hide their enthusiasms — so hot to audition their anomie that even elders (who should at least be cagey yet instead are caged) are nothing but roués in

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the face of it. In the face and teeth of whatever it is that creeps on broken trellis. They practice in mirrors, make faces in sliding glass. These lit-up, hillside, adumbrated houses are waiting rooms: dead nesting birds leap from tree to branchy scalp, as if, but not, by magic —

The whipporwill is coming to shout
And hush and cluck and flutter about:
I hear him begin far enough away
Full many a time to say his say
Before he arrives to say it out.

There is no Brentwood cul-de-sac or Cessna drone, no Takashimaya sugar spoon, no lab report — no last-season Hermès suit — no Percocet or Sunday brunch Bach, we've heard enough of Sunday Bach — no idiot diorama of discarded boogie board and lurid summer's day detritus — no sprinklers tsking on vibrant so-called Lynchian lawn — or muscle car or trampoline — no time machine — no moonlit adultery or whipporwill or tenebrous undertow of private school, wetbar, incest.

There are, though, oddly, slips of children in back rooms, hairy blond tumbleweed topping each arm. But still — no warm winds forcing trees to give up secrets.

We've heard enough — of that. Haven't we?

It is under the small, dim, summer star.
I know not who these mute folk are
Who share the unlit place with me —
Those stones out under the low-limbed tree
Doubtless bear names that the mosses mar.

Here, then, let us say, are the names of the stones: Victor, Diane... Carrie and Peter, Katy and Shannon, William and Malerie and Judith — here, they lie. When licked, these memorials of waxen skin smell leafy, sweetly pungent Nivea'd limbs like branches easily entwined in repose. Schooled in repose: so good at it now! Outside the bower, something whispers. Dead birds race from tree to sapling scalp — but we've heard enough. Haven't we heard enough?

So, here, then, again, let us say the stones: Victor, Diane, Carrie, Peter, Katy, Shannon, William, Malerie, Judith —

They are tireless folk, but slow and sad —
Though two, close-keeping, are lass and lad —
With none among them that ever sings,
And yet, in view of how many things.,
As sweet companions as might be had.

—*Ghost House*, Robert Frost