

August 12, 1996

### Visiting Mary

Everyone of them looked like Mary: women and men in clean and colorless dress, stooped inward, their bones protruding through transparent silky skin, their cheeks sucked-in and saliva running like tears from the sides of their toothless clammed mouths. Grey and efficient haircuts reveal their necks barley holding up heads strung, like on a dwindling wire, ready, like unpicked ripe and rotting fruits, to break off and roll on the sanitary faded-blue linoleum and disappear into the abyss that we call good earth. And then, very good children and grandchildren will plant ewe shrubs exactly on top of them and continue to pay for perpetual care, for little man on noisy tractors who water and trim and have lunch, spitting olive pits on the engraved stones saying "beloved father and devoted mother".

I swiveled around each wheel-chair knowing that this must be Mary but I did not recognize her and all of them recognized me. I know it, because as soon as their eyelids turned up, just scarcely, they smiled and nodded their hardly attached heads and said a very nice "hello" or so it sounded. "Hello!" "Hello" "Hi there!" I answered to each and every one of them, to the person who had his\her hand under their buttocks, to the person who sat on his\her stumps where there were once legs, to the person who sighed loudly and regularly every two seconds and to Mary, who was, like the Mary I remember, the prettiest, the ladyest, the purest woman who was like a mother to us all.

She smiled like the rest of them and recognized me: "Hello!" she said and smiled, nodding to me, knowing that she loved me some thirty years ago, remembering just enough to lift her blue arm and rest it back on the wheel-chair, missing the arm-rest and letting it hang and get even bluer. "Mary, Mary, it's me" I said and every one smiled and lifted their blue hands in my direction. The nurse said "may I help you?" like in a department store and I said "I am looking for Mary". "Mary? Mary! Now, where is Mary now?" She looked all around her and I said "But there she is" and the nurse said "very well then" and walked over to the desk calling "And who shall I say is calling?". "I am an old friend from far away and had not seen her in thirty years, but I will always recognize Mary. Hello Mary!" And all the blue hands waved hello and dropped and I hugged my Mary. "You are looking good and I am so happy that you are around", I called to Mary, just loudly enough for the nurse to see my good intentions. It was her turn to smile now and she relaxed at her desk, swiveling on her chair surveying the ward from left to right like a lifesaver in a dry swimming pool.

It was Friday night and the candles were fighting for their last breath. It smelled good: chicken soup and freshly baked Challah, mashed potatoes and carrots were being wheeled back to the kitchen,

2

dewy fresh flowers and dewy water coolers surrounded the big hall, a large clock measured standard time in a quiet and regular beat matched only by the sighs, the bedrooms along the corridor were lit, the doors decorated with names and paintings and photographs.

"Mary, Mary, this is me, from New York... I wanted you to know that I cooked your fish every Friday, that your brownies recipe is still the best, that I used to serve desserts on the silver tray you gave me, the first one I ever had, that my little son, to whom you gave his first toy-truck is now a father of three, that I have been a widow for five years now, that I stopped cooking fish and stopped polishing the silver, that I remember your Ralph, and your trellis covered with pink roses, and the tarragon and the thyme that you grew so tenderly and your special china: the oval hand-painted fish dishes with a different fish on each plate, and the Passover china and your crystal candle sticks, and sugar cubes and Sunshine cake and home made tomato sauce from your own tomatoes and the carpets and overstuffed chairs and the grandfather clock that had a regulated beat... And your very good hands which sliced and served and decorated and trimmed and wiped and blessed over the candles and wrapped those presents and froze the tarragon for winter, and why are they blue now, Mary, did you get hurt or is this a treatment of some sort, please speak to me Mary". And Mary smiled at me with reserve, and said: "That is the law, you know".

"Indeed, indeed" said I. "And how are your eyes nowadays? Can you see me, can you read, can you watch television, do you still do some ceramics, what do you think about, what do you remember, do you miss anything, what can I do for you???" And I hold her hand and touch her neck, as if to make sure they don't break off now, when I am here, and roll to the floor and into the good earth, and as I do that she talks to me again, "That is the law here, you know", accepting.

And I caress her hand as a tear rolls over my cheeks, and I feel my cheeks being slowly sucked-in and my hand starting to dwindle down, so I speed up my motions and the caress becomes a warm massage up and down her arm and the other one and the neck, and I stand behind the wheel-chair to reach her stooped-up shoulders as my tears fall on to her skin and penetrate her parchment-like, transparent coating, and I think she is purring and breathing faster as I sweat and weep on her head, her hands, her shoulders, as if I am still taking care of my own babies, transmitting my tears through my fingers to their frail bodies, now so big, so remote, and we both purr as we get warm and touched, and blood flows in my back to my head, breaking the barbed-wire of the dry circle that surrounds us both as I hear wheels rolling slowly, blue hands pushing them, coming towards me like desperate animals, growling, spitting to the floor, getting entangled in each other, bumping sides and backs as a he\she whispers "I am Mary" and suddenly another "I am Mary", "I am", "I am", and I am girdled by howls and blue hands waving and saliva, my tears pouring, encircled and trapped with skulls all of whom are indeed my Mary as I move my hands faster, to her front and her back making Mary breath and pink starts flowing in her veins,

the pink of her roses perhaps, and my fading blood, getting fainter as I transfuse it to her but my own skin feels softer, moister, as does hers, until I do not see or hear the big clock on the wall, not even the regular sighs, and the smell of the food vanishes and the nurse freezes at her desk, the chair stops still on its swivel as I bend down and kiss my Mary's head, going inward, folding away like an embryo in a pool of water, like a return to Mary's womb. And Mary looks around her, to all these wheels and skulls and invigorated she suddenly raises her voice, which I never heard raised before, and she orders the herd: "This is the law here, now, this is the law", and quietly, obediently, their heads dropping like rotting unpicked fruit, they turn away, crooning, moaning and silenced. And it is just Mary and me.

Raw but Hot,  
For you  
' Zoin