

CONTENTS

• • • Preface to the New and Selected Poems • • •

Speculations about "I" xvii

After all those years of fear and raging in my poems	5
After the Gwendolyn Brooks reading	8
Among school children	9
As my writing changes I think with sorrow of those who couldn't change	11
Biographia Literaria Africana	12
Blessed angels	13
Elegy for my husband	14
The enthusiast	15
The exchange	16
Gifts from the dead	17
Glimpse	
<i>Black woman as Magician at CVS</i>	19
<i>The most surprising and necessary ingredient in my mother's spaghetti sauce</i>	19
<i>Bad Dad</i>	19
<i>Glimpse</i>	20
I count on you invisible	21
I give in to an old desire	22
The intimates	
<i>The intimates</i>	24
<i>On a woman who excuses herself from the table, even in restaurants, to brush her teeth</i>	24
<i>Homage</i>	25

Jerry Stern's friendship	26
<i>La fille aux cheveux de lin</i>	27
Lauds	28
Midnight: Long Train Passing	29
My father in old age	30
A nap	31
New Orleans palmetto bug	
1. <i>False Gods</i>	32
2. <i>Why the giant palmetto bugs in New Orleans run toward you when you are screaming at them to go away</i>	33
Note	34
Pantoum for the Broken	35
The Peaches of August	36
The permission	37
The proof	40
Rereading Jerry Stern	44
Sex in old age	45
Streaming	46
Summer evening at Still Point	47
Telly redux: Sharon asks me to send a picture of little fishie Telly	48
Watching a roach give birth on YouTube, I think of Lucille Clifton meeting God	49
"What are you?"	52

• • • **The Empress of the Death House** • • •

sleeping with mr. death	59
the story of a very broken lady	60

the mirror poems	63
the face/as it must be/of love	69
doll poem	70
new lady godiva	72
The Grandmother Poems	
<i>The Empress of the Death House</i>	73
<i>The Feeding</i>	75
<i>The Funeral Parade</i>	77
from a group of poems thinking about Anne Sexton on the anniversary of her death	78
unburying the bird	80

• • • **Natural Birth** • • •

Introduction: Writing <i>Natural Birth</i>	85
november	88
holy cross hospital	92
maternity	97
10:29	98
transition	104
delivery	110
in knowledge of young boys	122

• • • **Captivity** • • •

The Minks	125
Blackbottom	127
Christmas Eve: My Mother Dressing	128
St. Peter Claver	130
The Weakness	131

Fires in Childhood	133
High School	136
Hamtramck: The Polish Women	137
The Struggle	138
Before Making Love	139
On Stopping Late in the Afternoon for Steamed Dumplings	140
Stuck	141
Squeaky Bed	142
The Good Old Dog	143
The Promise	144
For a Man Who Speaks with Birds	146
Touching/Not Touching: My Mother	147
My Father Still Sleeping after Surgery	149
Boy at the Paterson Falls	150
Fears of the Eighth Grade	151
The Furious Boy	152
In an Urban School	153
The Polishers of Brass	154
For the Dishwasher at Boothman's	155
Plaid Pants	156
Books	157
Allen Ginsberg	158
On the Turning Up of Unidentified Black Female Corpses	160
A Note on My Son's Face	162

• • • **Tender** • • •

Preface	169
Tender	171
Exits from Elmina Castle: Cape Coast, Ghana	
<i>The Journey</i>	173
<i>The Tour</i>	174
<i>Tourists' Lunch</i>	174
<i>Beneath Elmina</i>	175
<i>Above Elmina</i>	176
<i>Slavery</i>	176
<i>Power</i>	177
<i>Market</i>	178
When My Father Was Beating Me	179
Black Boys Play the Classics	181
Brother	182
Family Secrets	183
After a Reading at a Black College	184
For Black Women Who Are Afraid	185
Passing	186
Bookstore	188
Invisible Dreams	189
Two Poems	
<i>Peripheral</i>	193
<i>Bird</i>	193
1:30 A.M.	194
Dead Baby Speaks	198
The Origins of the Artist: Natalie Cole	205
From a Letter: About Snow	206
Not Forgotten	207

Grace Paley Reading	208
Clitoris	209

• • • **The Undertaker's Daughter** • • •

Preface to <i>The Undertaker's Daughter</i>	
<i>An apology to the reader</i>	213

PART I. THE UNDERTAKER'S DAUGHTER

I am not afraid to be memoir	217
Beds	218
The undertaker's daughter	237
Sunday afternoon at Claire Carlyle's	239
Dolls	241
Mistrust of the beloved	252

PART II. A MEMORY OF THE FUTURE

I see my father after his death	255
My dad & sardines	258
The new pet	260
The Telly Cycle	261
<i>For Telly the fish</i>	262
<i>Special ears</i>	264
<i>Another poem of a small grieving for my</i>	
<i>fish Telly</i>	265
<i>On the reasons I loved Telly the fish</i>	267
<i>Because I was good to Telly in his life,</i>	271
<i>An apology to Telly the revolutionary</i>	273
When the goddess makes love to me,	275
Untitled	276
The night I stopped singing like Billie Holiday	277
When I touched her	283

A little prayer to Our Lady	284
Cherry blossoms	285

PART III. THE UNDERTAKING

The exigencies of form	289
The undertaking	290



Acknowledgments	297
-----------------	-----