



1984

Tunnels

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TUNNELS

I sit by these tunnels in the weeds
and I remember
how July was--or should I think of August?
I'm not sure.
A lot of time I've spent in martyrdom, that kingdom
in which one hour of experience becomes two of remembrance;
in which the price paid is the actual value doubled.

It was difficult to not send a card for your birthday: always
I had hoped that you would realize how much I cared
and react accordingly.
But the romanticism has drained and rubbed apart
like a blister,
like leaves after enduring the transitions: the Fall-Winter hardness,
the Winter-Spring thawing,
the Spring-Summer drying,
the inevitable crumbling in the Fall.

There is no love in excessive pride
nor in the absence of self-respect;
I won't call,
I won't write,
I won't send messages through your friends.
I only will do as I do now, sitting near these tunnels whose insides
are wet with the sweat of old waters and old lovers
With weeds poking at the bare skin revealed by an untucked shirt,
I wait, and I try to learn to like it.
I try to replace remembrance with snatches of self-respect,
like the self-imposed blindman who finds satisfaction
in his intensified sense of smell.

No card was sent this year, I'm sorry.
July--or should I think of August?--is not affordably sacred now.
Self-respect is too expensive to be washed away by the waters that bathe
these tunnels.

Ruth Hill