

"SHE SAID AS WELL TO ME"

SHE said as well to me: "Why are you ashamed?

That little bit of your chest that shows between  
the gap of your shirt, why cover it up?

Why shouldn't your legs and your good strong  
thighs

be rough and hairy?--I'm glad they are like  
that.

You are shy, you silly, you silly shy thing.

Men are the shyest creatures, they never will come  
out of their covers. Like any snake  
slipping into its bed of dead leaves, you hurry into  
your clothes.

And I love you so! Straight and clean and all of a  
piece is the body of a man,  
such an instrument, a spade, like a spear, or an  
oar,

such a joy to me--"

So she laid her hands and pressed them down my  
sides,

so that I began to wonder over myself, and what I  
was.

She said to me: "What an instrument, your  
body!

single and perfectly distinct from everything else!

What a tool in the hands of the Lord!

Only God could have brought it to its shape.

It feels as if his handgrasp, wearing you

had polished you and hollowed you,

hollowed this groove in your sides, grasped you

under the breasts

and brought you to the very quick of your form,

subtler than an old, soft-worn fiddle-bow.

"When I was a child, I loved my father's riding-

whip

that he used so often.

I loved to handle it, it seemed like a near part of

him.

So I did his pens, and the jasper seal on his desk.

Something seemed to surge through me when I

touched them.

"So it is with you, but here

The joy I feel!

God knows what I feel, but it is joy!

Look, you are clean and fine and singled out!

I admire you so, you are beautiful: this clean

sweep of your sides, this firmness, this hard

mould!

I would die rather than have it injured with one  
scar.

I wish I could grip you like the fist of the Lord,  
and have you--"

So she said, and I wondered,  
feeling trammelled and hurt.  
It did not make me free.

Now I say to her: "No tool, no instrument, no  
God!

Don't touch me and appreciate me.

It is an infamy.

You would think twice before you touched a  
weasel on a fence

as it lifts its straight white throat.

Your hand would not be so flig and easy.

Nor the adder we saw asleep with her head on her  
shoulder,

curled up in the sunshine like a princess;

when she lifted her head in delicate, startled  
wonder

you did not stretch forward to caress her

though she looked rarely beautiful

and a miracle as she glided delicately away, with  
such dignity.

And the young bull in the field, with his wrinkled,  
sad face,  
you are afraid if he rises to his feet,  
though he is all wistful and pathetic, like a mono-  
lith, arrested, static.

"Is there nothing in me to make you hesitate?  
I tell you there is all these.  
And why should you overlook them in me?--"