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# There Ain't Nothing

*for Karen Solie*

Aretha sings *there ain't nothing like the real thing*  
and I agree. Someone overhears and says,  
nothing profound in that, and I agree with that too.

A picture on a wall, for instance,  
will not answer when Aretha calls its name;  
it cannot move her or groove her like the sound  
of his sweet voice whispering in her ear.  
It cannot hold her like the hold of his strong arms.

When he was an infant  
I held Benjamin in my arms, and  
we danced in the living room of her song,

the man and the picture of that man, the song  
and the singer of that song, its writer, those words,  
that infant in my arms.

## His Name Was Ken

My mother-in-law looks at the world through a small window  
she would like to have cleaned but she can't get it done.  
So I come over to take her out for coffee,  
and as her wheelchair bumps over the careful violence  
of the street, she says be careful not to spill me out.  
I am very careful especially when we go downhill  
and I have to lean back so she doesn't roll away  
and pour out in front of the coffee shop.

She doesn't want to wear the yellow sunglasses  
we bought her at the institute, but when we get outside  
I can tell the glare is too much for her, so I lean over  
and put mine on her and it's better.  
She wonders if we're lost, and I say no  
we just haven't been here before  
so it's a new experience like landing on the moon,

and she remembers watching that on TV with me  
while her daughter was at a rehearsal  
where the director wouldn't let them stop  
and I say no that wasn't me.  
I don't know where I was at the time,  
but it wasn't there.

She likes her sweets but worries about gaining weight  
and I say hey! go for it — at ninety-one what have you got  
to lose? And she tells me about her sister who died  
and left some money to her grandson  
who called to say it wasn't enough  
and she becomes livid and sad.

I bring her the smallest latte they have so it won't keep her up.  
She looks at her watch, and I tell her not to worry  
I'll be sure to have her back in time for supper. After all, I say,  
it's not like returning from the moon.  
It's not like that movie  
where they almost didn't make it back.

She's been to the moon too many times  
and it's just too boring, she says.  
She doesn't want to go again.  
And then she asks if I remember the time  
and I say no, that was another time.  
His name was Ken.

I take her back a smoother way.  
As I wheel her into the hall, we hear a thwack  
and she says tennis. Then I take her  
into her room and she thanks me  
as she settles in to watch the world on TV.

## My Book of Words

Each day I make this world  
one word at a time  
bathroom sink the critical  
comb that mocks my hair,  
Mr. Mirror  
who mimics my face  
my teeth my  
indentured smile.

This world of my imagining —  
is it any wonder I get it muddled  
and confused?  
Each day like leaves  
the words fall away  
and a tree remains  
that ramifies  
into empty air.

Such is my paradise —  
the lifeless load  
I do not lift  
the splash  
of waking  
the fresh  
face there.



## Music on Lincoln Road

I'd like to play for you  
by ear, jam if I can.  
The lessons I learned  
were so canned  
with the metronome  
always on tock  
tic tock tic tock.

When my tune  
takes a wander  
I sometimes  
know where to put  
a foot down  
on the shovel  
that digs  
the song I sing.

I'm happy to spend  
happy times with you  
when the blues riff  
away  
happy to sing  
in the improvised sun  
songs for supper  
and for fun.

## In Disarray

I staggered early into disarray.  
I slept in fields of every thought  
where I stood brazen with beliefs.  
I thought all thinkers drank the dawn.

I sang the praise of every day  
from sight's momentum  
on dew wet on grass  
to legends I learned by feel.

And then I read the holy  
texts of this and that.  
I have to admit I could  
not believe in any of it.

How could I live in consequence  
who lived so long in disarray?