

## *Recalling Sarah*

I'm moved to write to you  
Whom I have never known  
Whom I have always known.

How can it be? I am puzzled  
By my own assurance  
(I, who am assured about so little)  
Over someone who died  
Before I was born  
And lived a world away.

I look at my creased, handed-down photo  
Of your softly sepia'd twenty-year-old self  
And wonder.  
Your dark-eyed composure  
Composes in turn my thoughts  
There's poise in your posture  
And challenge in the tilt of your head  
A delicate sense of expectancy  
As you look back through me and beyond  
Towards a future that never really happened.

The parameters of disease  
Marked out in the white-sheeted hospital bed  
The tread of nurses, the clink of medicine bottles  
And their hopeless ministrations, all this  
A mere decade away.

## *Recalling Sarah, cont.*

For now, though  
You're all dressed up, bridal-like again  
And oh, so elegant  
A photo was no small occasion, then.  
But in your eyes  
(my father's eyes, my eyes)  
Is a foreshadowing  
Of space where  
A life should have been.

When you coughed  
Strawberry splashes  
Through your handkerchief,

And sweated the night away  
Awaking fatigued and heavy-lunged,  
They knew.

You wept, as they took you away  
The corridors of your memory  
Running you back to when  
You held your child's heartbeat close to yours  
Not covered up, separated, segregated  
Portioned off like something unclean.

And when they brought your son to visit  
The nurses bit their lips  
And kept him at a distance.  
It was a cruel farewell.

I think  
He never stopped missing you  
And the missingness  
Was passed down, and down.

And so your photo  
Still sits in front of me  
A haunting, present absence.

*Note: My grandmother passed away from pulmonary tuberculosis  
in 1932. She was 33.*