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Marden Clark

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Three Poems

Marden Clark*

TOO LATE ON MOTHER'S DAY

And so at last she died.
 But fought it still for fourteen months
 Four hundred days for her to bear
 And us to bank against the lonely hours.

I reckon up the debits first:
 Four hundred days of drab, explosive pain
 Hers from twisted, swollen joints, from migraine hell,
 From any bug or enzyme chancing by
 Ours from simply looking on.
 My God! but pain like that!

The credits won't add up.
 The columns waver, twist, and swell
 As though themselves were full of life and pain,
 But still they're long:
 Her gentle pain-seared face
 An hour or two of simple chat
 Some moment-hours of
 Son-mother love
 A few hour-moments of
 Mother-son depth.
 Field-fresh iris from Mary and Arch
 Or Zinnias or spears of glads or columbine,
 Or mums.
 She loved beauty so.

More subtly
 We felt and feel the bond
 Of empathy
 We nine to her
 But each to other too
 A bond of pain—
 But pain like that!

*Dr. Clark is professor of English at Brigham Young University.

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Our father's gentleness
Slowborn of pain
Now hedges each of us about
And ties us back to him
To her.

We're in the black—no question now.
Columns of intangibles more delicate and real
Than all my words—they tilt the balance.
Even the interest we pay on pain—remembered pain—
Has softened into credit now. And dividends of love
Accrue without our even sensing them—
No audit wanted here:
The dividends of love
From life like that
From love like that
Oh God! from pain like that.

IN A WORD
ON EASTER

What's in a name?
In a name
a single word

Annunciation and at once
Beatitude and
Benediction

In a name
a single word not a touch
touch me not but infinite
Communion

In a name
a single word
Definition and at once
Summation of her and of
Him

Definition and at once
Summation an utterly
new and utterly
ineffable
Relation between
Him and her
and between
Him and all
Mankind

In a name
from a carpenter a gardener
from the Word
in a word

"Mary"

TO THE BABY WE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW
WE WEREN'T GOING TO HAVE

You surprised us, like the heavy snow of September,
Neither counted on nor wished for.
Nothing yet to suggest new life or love.
And two years since, we'd thought to make an end.

The pang of loss is ours by right.
That at least her labor should have earned.
But only blood, the flow and clot, we had,
A woman's pain, a husband's helpless scurry.
You couldn't even come clean for us. A surgeon's knife
And scraping. D and C, they called it. And charged as much
As if they'd brought new life.

"Give life," we hear. "In this you act the role
of God." It must be true. But such flawed actors
For such a role. Creators ought to start
With perfect image and power perfect, too, to realize
In creature the perfection of themselves.
We didn't even make a start, not with you,
Not with the others.

We count our six and sense the strength.
I guess we feel they're share enough.
But now we'll never know the unknown road
That you have led us down. We'll never know
What new capacities for love or joy or fear
You would have brought. We'll never know
Ourselves, the us that you'd have made of us—for you
Could not have dodged the role, no more than we.

In tranquil moments now we think of what we missed.
September snow can never stay; but soft and wet
It softens all the earth, though branches break
And wires snap. The pain soon fades. But you're not here
To take its place. And we can only know the sense
Of what should be the sense of loss, can only know
You're not—and we're the same.