

## For My Lover, Returning to His Wife

Anne Sexton

*The poet characterizes illicit and married love and makes distinctions between the nature of the lover and of the wife.*

She is all there.

She was melted carefully down for you

and cast up from your childhood,

cast up from your one hundred favorite aggies.<sup>1</sup>

5 She has always been there, my darling.

She is, in fact, exquisite.

Fireworks in the dull middle of February

and as real as a cast-iron pot.

Let's face it, I have been momentary.

10 A luxury: A bright red sloop in the harbor.

My hair rising like smoke from the car window.

Littleneck clams out of season.

She is more than that. She is your have to have,

has grown you your practical your tropical growth.

15 This is not an experiment. She is all harmony.

She sees to oars and oarlocks for the dinghy,

has placed wild flowers at the window at breakfast,

sat by the potter's wheel at midday,

set forth three children under the moon,

20 three cherubs drawn by Michelangelo,

done this with her legs spread out

in the terrible months in the chapel.

If you glance up, the children are there

like delicate balloons resting on the ceiling.

25 She has also carried each one down the hall

after supper, their heads privately bent,

two legs protesting, person to person.

her face flushed with a song and then both sleep

I give you back your heart.

30 I give you permission—

for the fuse inside her, throbbing

angrily in the dirt, for the bitch in her

and the burying of her wound—

for the burying of her small red wound alive—

35 for the pale flickering flare under her ribs,

for the drunken sailor who wats in her left pulse,

for the mother's knee, for the stockings,

for the garter belt, for the call—

the curious call

40 when you will burrow in arms and breasts

and tug at the orange ribbon in her hair

and answer the call, the curious call.

She is so naked and singular.

She is the sum of yourself and your dream.

45 Climb her like a monument, step after step.

She is solid.

As for me, I am a watercolor.

I wash off.

### ■ EXPLORATIONS OF THE TEXT ■

1. Characterize the voice of the speaker in the poem.
2. What does the speaker think about the lover's/husband's attitude toward his wife? How does the speaker view herself? the wife?
3. Interpret the list of things that she gives him "permission" for: "fuse inside her," "the bitch in her," "the burying of her small wound," "the pale flickering flare," "the drunken sailor," "the knee." What does each of these images signify?
4. What is "the curious call"?
5. Why does the speaker compare the wife to a "monument"? Why speaker a "watercolor"?
6. Why will the lover return to his wife and leave the speaker?