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HOWARD MC CORD

BEING MEN & WOMEN TOGETHER

For Jo and Clarence

Being men and women together,
Loving and breaking,
Finding the hand wiser than the eye
And the eye wiser than the hand,
Knowing that joys will be taken away
And hurts always replenished,
Watching Saint Paul writhe, normally and morally,
At his, or our defeat, or from it,
(we are not sure)
We try to grasp our properties.

In the shifting and the grave of love
We hide the inside dark till dawn,
Then wake to all the sour tasks
That keep us civilized;
Yet whatever the day gives, the night,
Or blood, or a lover has taken away.
For in our wretched haste to kiss
We bite each other's lips,
And though we cry, and plead forgiveness,
We are nourished by the other's wound.

There is laughter at parties, and friends
Who find the ear wiser than the tongue
And the tongue wiser than the ear,
Who have spent years circling the game of language,
Which one need not play to lose.
And what we hear as voices tell us
We should speak to one another,
As we should love,
But utterly in our eyes are jeers and catcalls
And the obscenity of silence.

There should be a pulse, a harmonic,
A pattern of sense; but intentions warp,
Motives suck on themselves, and I,
A man, know the ignominy and betrayal
My prick has led me to.
And being man, and honest, and likely deceived,
I pray women are led to no worse traps than I,
That whatever screams hide in their wombs,
Whatever flow it is they're tuned to,
Whatever puzzle they delight to make of love,
Their hurt may be the less.
And may they pray this so of me.

We pray often—to God, or whatever moves—
For quiet, for numb Saturday mornings
And the end of hurt, for one more stinking fit
Of happiness, one hour without
The lurching, stumbling cretin of doubt
Grabbing at our hands and calling *Father*,
To forget the disgust at what we eat
(though the taste will never be out of our mouths).

We would be loyal, deliberately choosing
(for no reason, no reason) someone
Out of bedlam to focus on, to invest
As axis or center,
But we are traitors to our own wills;
And smile at the incredulous hurt
That knots her face with our repeated treacheries.
And she, in turn, watches us carefully, openly,
In pain.

We sometimes try to speak by music, and Vivaldi,
Henry Purcell build us walls to talk against,
But these fall, or go out like fires, or Haydn.
And the children disappear, little wax figures
Melting in the years.

And then we cry.