

## 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!

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

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

at once

Annunciation and  
Beatitude and  
Benediction

In a name

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

In a name

a single word

at once

Definition and  
Summation of her and of  
Him

at once

Definition and  
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.