

Twi St George Tucker
BIRTHDAY LETTER TO NINA

12 AM June 28

Catawba

1976?
summer?

As the hour passes,
the midnight hour,
over into Nina's birthday,
white light flashes:
a summer thundershower,
cannon booming, crashing in the leaf-surf --
rejoices.

Nina herself was washed new
for her birthday eve just past, caught in a storm
when she walked down hill through woods
for the mail, (she saw two animals, red fox-colored,
run into the woods together)
-- she was joyous at release of static
electric tension, always responsive to the flow
from positive to negative.

Birthday? wild rebirthday!
Nina new, come light and laughing
out of the storm (I'd feared
for her struggling in slippery steep mud,
not geared, she, a North European,
for our drenching southern
subtropic torrents -- I worried she would be soaked,
chilled -- but she warmed and freshened --)
quietly, gently, merrily
riding the storm.

Nina says she doesn't want her birthday
celebrated, not this, the first
without Paul -- and I say
we're not without Paul -- he's all
over, I feel him, in the jasmine green and white
at her window, that lets fall white petals
on the path to her door,
in the yellow butterfly on the parsley,
and the big gray-brown moth she had me rescue
from the kitchen, in the wind song
in the oaks, and we know it, and that he wants
rejoicing and a newborn
Nina, he wants the birthday; and the children,
whether their letters are on time in this out- of- the-way
eminence,
are thinking intently of her this day, loving,
desiring, dreaming of her and her well-being --
they are here, and Eva too,
the beautiful child who loved
these woods and hills, is here, as Paul's here, the living
as the dead -- for it's mind,
a spirit, that's here -- as we sit
at dinner on the porch, looking after the sun

where it swam behind trees
pale blue and pink mist its soft garments trailing
-- all are here, and your father too
rejoices
this day, his and yours, you,
child of his heaven, father and child born together,
under the same star.

Of the portals, of birth and dying,
of transition, of metamorphosis,
of diff'rent states of being, of animal and not-animal
being, what know we,
Darling? What we know for sure is love, love
for you, of father, mother, husband, children,
sister, brother, grandchildren, friends
(and the one writing here), of living,
of dead, you who everyone
loves, feel it 'round you in waves, in wind,
in sunray.

The morning of your birthday
a last raindrop dangling
from a leaf shimmers
the sun into one
diamond.

tightly winding; so the great oak
before the Main House -- Dow Hodges the roadman
said oaks grow slowly, in hard clear golden resinous
the oak heart's structure -- gold sap
of a century and a half, he says, is coiled:
so light and love
is compacted into Nina, her essence
sweetly concentrates, a gold ring for every year.

The day went on
with jubilant dangerous storms
stamping with waves of warm water,
scaring me as I drove the Blue Ridge Parkway,
I couldn't see an inch before me
on the road when I went for
little gifts -- Vera wanted
a white scarf for Nina, I
some wooden plates from the Craft Center.

The home letters came -- from Bati,
Felix, Hedy, Carolyn, Suzy, beautiful
letters of love and greater need
for Nina than before, they too
are missing Paul, and thinking
of Paul.

At night
we drank sherry,
Nina, Vera and I
together before our hearth-fire red-tongued and crackling,
eating blueberries and milk after a ceremonial
feast of lamb cooked deliciously by Nina in her special way,
with a huge fresh bouquet in Dennis' great camp kettle,
dripping raindrops,
-- that cleansing rain of Nina's birthday --
mountain laurel, the year's last, from Bolick's
beautiful sacred pasture serene, where
holy bulls stampeded
as I snapped the hemlock,
pine and laurel boughs, that fullest pink bough
they wouldn't let me steal; also, dead laurel
branches with lichens in rosettes and thread mosses
exquisitely adorned, for forest death
is beautiful, like the green fire
of moss on fallen trees,
and banks of mountain fern and dark glossy rhododendron leaves
joined the laurel painting Vera did for her
birthday, all rejoice for Nina's birth,
that flower person! and I found

two wild white young onion-lilies that told me,
take them to Nina to play lily
to her rose -- these she accepted
to guard her, as, butterfly from its silk prison,
into new life shyly smiling
she emerges, newborn angel unfolding
new wings.