

NOVEMBER 15, BEFORE THE FROST

This morning
I found out
I could smell,
an acrid, shit smell,
everywhere, in the
frying pan with the
pancakes,
hovering around my daughter
in her leotard,
and I
found out about
nature—that
it exists, that
there's an
outdoors and that
while I've been
indoors flat
in bed, or turning
from side to
side, sweat
pooling in the
collar of my
nightie, during
the rain I've
vaguely heard
all week roaring
on the roof,
the gold leaves
of the sugar maple
next door
have been falling—
I had just noticed
the tree before I got
sick, had said
to myself, Finally,
November whatever
and there's a dressed-
up tree! I'll bet
the whole
darn thing's down
now, since I've
come in to do
the dishes.

Yesterday I found
 my journal from
four years
 ago. I certainly
didn't know it
 then, but I look
upon it now
 as a sort of
golden age;
 then it was cold
slush, but now
 it's snow in the
streetlights at twilight,
 the cold creeping
up the walls of the
 house, the radiator
clanking. I saw him for
 one hour every
other week
 for three years.
He saw the same
 movies I did and
talked about
 the splendors
of failure. He had a son. . . .
 I realized with a
kind of sharp pang
 my precise loss. That
my life without
 him is
unquestionably poorer.
 That's it, like
a light on
 or a light off,
like that tree glorying
 in the damp
coolness out there—
 you know how
they mysteriously
 brighten in the rain—
then shedding, still
 glorious,
while I sweat it
 out inside
then boom
 the tree

is indistinguishable
from the others,
the yard, the gray
sky, leaf
rot, no
longer standing
out.