

## Mother Carey's Hen

There are days I don't think about the sea;  
    weeks wash by, in fact,  
then a shearwater—or some such—flutters by  
on the salt flats fanning out in my mind's eye,  
reflected there, a shimmering reverie,  
    recalling the pact

I once made (and renew today) to hold  
    to a higher altitude.  
But note the difference between this bird  
and me: a slight disruption or harsh word  
and I crash, folded seaward, letting cold  
    life intrude;

whereas the petrel, mindless of such height,  
    scales each watery hill  
that rises up, adapting to the shape  
of each impediment, each low escape  
instinct in it, the scope of its flight  
    fitted to its will.

## The Call

The call comes and you're out. When you retrieve  
the message and return the call, you learn  
that someone you knew distantly has died.  
His bereaved partner takes you through the news.

She wants to tell you personally how  
he fought and, then, how suddenly he went.  
She's stunned, and you feel horrible for her,  
though somewhat dazed, since he was not a friend,

just someone you saw once or twice a year,  
and who, in truth, always produced a shudder:  
you confess that you never liked him much,  
not to her, of course, but silently to yourself.

You feel ashamed, or rather think the word  
*ashamed*, and hurry off the line. That's when  
the image of him appears more vividly,  
with nicotine-stained fingertips and hair

like desert weeds fetched up on chicken wire,  
the rapacious way he always buttonholed  
you at a launch, his breath blowsy with wine.  
Well, that will never ever happen again:

one less acquaintance who stops to say hello,  
apparently happy at the sight of you.  
So why then this surprising queasiness,  
not of repulsion but of something like remorse,

that comes on you without your guessing it,  
till the thing that nagged you most—his laugh, perhaps—  
becomes the very music that you miss,  
or think you do, or want to, now he's gone.