

# A Scattering

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Extract

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Having had the good fortune to live in the *roman fleuve*  
of your life, my darling,  
playing no small part, but – that’s not my name on the cover –  
second always to you, the dashing heroine,  
I have hesitated, havered too long, to compose  
this necessary footnote.  
You would have understood why.

I write now in the cumbersome  
retrospective mood;  
you lived in the present-future,  
a tense of your own invention.

The text hurtled along. There was no time for revision.  
Unpublished, a dozen different,  
variant manuscripts,  
distributed among friends, who refer to them frequently.  
My own copy is in front of me this minute.  
This way and that, I turn  
the exhilarating pages.  
Exhilarating and sad.

Did anyone ever match your appetite  
for plans and projects,  
for doing two or three things at the same time?

You watched bad television, had me massage your neck, and  
sewed  
lavishly beautiful patchwork quilts.

When that quack put you on a punishing diet,  
you pedalled a borrowed exercise-bicycle  
for however many static miles a day  
and learned Italian from a book supported on the handlebars.

Your breakfast reading was a gardening encyclopaedia  
which took up half the table;  
you absorbed the Linnaean taxonomy along with your  
grapefruit and coffee.

Two or three things at the same time.

Can’t you now somehow contrive  
to be both dead and alive?

## Late

Late home one night, I found  
she was not yet home herself.  
So I got into bed and waited  
under my blanket mound,  
until I heard her come in  
and hurry upstairs.  
My back was to the door.  
Without turning round,  
I greeted her, but my voice  
made only a hollow, parched-throated  
*k*, *k*, *k*- sound,  
which I could not convert into words  
and which, anyway, lacked  
the force to carry.  
Nonplussed, but not distraught,  
I listened to her undress,  
then sidle along the far side  
of our bed and lift the covers.  
Of course, I'd forgotten she'd died.  
Adjusting my arm for the usual  
cuddle and caress,  
I felt mattress and bedboards  
welcome her weight  
as she rolled and settled towards me,  
but, before I caught her,  
it was already too late  
and she'd wisped clean away.