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Folk Song: On the Road Again, Swept

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Folk Song: On the Road Again

Pennsylvania in early spring.
Daffodils yellow by the fences.
Different from home
   where the earth
is still struggling to throw off
   winter's bedraggled mantle.
   I went walking up Len's hill
with Len's black dog named Magic
   after Magic Johnson looking
along the hedgerows for wildflowers,
anything springlike I thought—
   bloodroot, skunk cabbage, or
   arbutus hiding,
but found only one little heal-all
   in the fraught grass.
I was thinking of my lovely wife
at home in the dying winter, I was
   thinking of Odysseus wandering,
of Dr. Williams when he came to Chicago
after his first stroke, after he had
   "recovered," how
he had gone sleepless on the Pullman,
how he trembled, how he was afraid.
   And where was Floss? Why had he
   left her at home?
Why was Penny O. in Ithaka all those years
   and not on the beaches of Ilion?
Why is Joe-Anne not here when I
   go walking on Len's hill alone
with Magic and my heart attack
trembling in my chest?
Did Dr. Williams leave Floss at home
in Rutherford to spare her the second
stroke—the crisis of aloneness
on the road?
Why does the thought of Catullus in
exile on the Thracian shore
waiting for death
linger in my mind these years of my
own approaching
final solitude?
Why when certitude was promised
does my mind dwindle to questioning?
Why in Pennsylvania in early spring
is it so cold?

Swept

When we say I
miss you what
we mean is I’m
filled with
dread. At night
alone going
to bed is
like lying down
in a wave. Total
absence of light.
Swept away
to gone.