

THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW IF I SAY YES

I've never understood my favorite persona well.  
She comes and goes at will,  
sometimes more than once a day.  
Now and then I turn and do  
a double take to make sure it really is she.

Her voice is alto soft; you call her shy.  
She's the best to marry, she's the one  
who doesn't have to win  
or even compete. She'd be satisfied  
with a bungalow, a hatchback, and country food.

This place is always crowded; I didn't see  
my other friend come in. I say  
"friend" because she's been so close--  
all through school in the same class,  
so many nights in the same bed.

Fantasizing about some boy she wanted bad,  
she never spared details. Her imagery would wheel  
through my head, center in my lower half and while  
I lay thinking how a slow hot cure would feel  
against my aching, she'd begin to fill

her mental shopping cart with perks and goods  
her favors could harvest-- as if the gods  
designed her just to be rewarded for her beauty.  
I'd call her nasty names and say her body  
was not meant to be used that way.

I'd make her promise to behave, then we  
wouldn't speak for several nights.  
She'd wait till I was studying, stomach in knots,  
then talk about clothes or cars; she wanted it all.  
Next day I'd hear her laughing as I rode the El,

struggling with a thesis and a nine pound book,  
her "degrees won't get it for you, babe," in the back  
of my mind. So of course you've also met her,  
a cunning child with trailing scented hair,  
looking lies from under lashes long enough

to blow in the wind, her voice sometimes a knife  
out of its sheath. You've seen her eyes, wild  
craving as a hawk's, cool fire like a cougar's, willed  
to the art of pursuit, always weighing, always hiding  
something. And you've fallen in their orbit, unheeding.