Poem for Dee

Dear Dee how will it be?
tell me in time this time, I've been with you
so seldom and so seldom free—
if ever free! clashes that surfaced only
on your side and me continuously
stubborn with rue.
Your fingers lately
fierce into my upper arms when I came for tea
in that Victorian basement, scolding me
soundly for taking "good Canadian money"
and living away—

We were never together long—
at Chicken Haven
and the house against the salty cemetery
you rented for a song
end of the road in
more ways than one

When you are gone
all the little poets of Canada will be
writing with feeling, feelingly,
pressing their lives up against your long
unquiet one, poems you won't see.
But I want returns and rude advice,
your real and accurate voice
rebuking me.
Once on a Galiano road among
salmonberry and blackberry
and me bemoaning some old misery
you said, "It's time
for you to love a woman."
I did not heed, not then or now.

Long ago you were lovely
in the photos, dark as Marcia (who may be gray)
dark then as her daughter—
estranged! At 50, 60, 70
you bullied us for our best, the prow
of your jutty chin and breasts—you alter
suddenly into age, the abashment of even greater
beauty.
The soul is nothing but the visible, I should know.

I want to ask you how to be
what I now swiftly
become, impoverished, aphasic, to see
with that cloudshot downglance
back into the century
quarrel with secretary after secretary
find out how words once uttered fairly
innocently get twisted into articles that lie
visited, hung on, little twisty
threads of you pulled loose—dispersed!

Tell me how you lift down and put away
over and over those first
angers of absence
resentful family who actually
think it is you they heave and carry?
On the beach at Active Pass, your clever son
turns up native flints and worked jade traded from
Japan
and cannot interest his sullen
child, your nervy
girl has found a harsh creed
and kept her brood
from your improvidence—
how will I learn
when my sons grow bashful as they turn,
is your crafty song
worth this, is mine?

Your balance has gone off, you say,
your inner ear—what irony.
You who turned moral outrage and untimely
power into a narrow, pleasing lay
garlands of artifice with no surprises
you never risked the pattern's disarray
or even touched the edges
it's of a piece
the asp within the lace

Maybe this time, I'll parry
a querulous embrace
and be less shy—
and ask about what matters, finally—
the formal harmony
outlives, out-fabricates the story:
the stanch and seemly
lances of Uccello, the bearable purity
of Bellini's Crucifixion sky,
and now your blithe, well written face—
the woman you are, Dee,
the woman I'll see.

Heather Spears is currently living in Denmark.