

TWO POEMS



Mary O'Connor

TRAVELOGUE

Officer and Laughing Girl

—VERMEER

Beneath this window you might hear the sea.
And isn't this a pleasant time to use
To drink our beer and talk—I have much news—
Now Father is asleep? Oh, good friend. Be
At home here, this sweet April afternoon!
I have a buyer for my yellow bulbs and red.
The guilders justly paid will keep us fed
And Father in small luxuries till June.
My sister's children grow and grow. They ask
Of you; I show your letters, map you round
The Middle Sea, with soldiers off to Samarkand,
Khalkis. Delicious names. How great a task!
We've waked in fear, in case you've met with strife
Or storms or sirens; dreamed your ship cut through
By bulging rocks—But you must live, must go.
We're strong. And you come bringing us new life.

He did not take her hand or ask which place
The light came from, the window or her face.

HET LEZENDE VROUWTJE

A Woman in Blue Reading a Letter

—VERMEER

Mild daylight washes the room,
 smoothes her young face,
 burnishes her smock of pale blue silk
 which spreads to a pure heaviness below the waist.

She is still,
 held
 in the canopy of light, by the fresh
 new words of the letter in her hands.

Her mouth is a little open—struggling with the words?
 A child's mouth, a child's hands, free of pretence:
 amazed to find herself so loved, so
 held
 in this intangible love.

And all is new, is news: the light, the letter,
 the life
 within her, dependent on her blood and spirit
 as she is nourished by, dependent on, his words.

Woman, woman
 come away from that window,
 drop the letter as if unnoticed, from your fingers. Over here
in the shadow,

 life's not so smooth, so clear.

 Textures are muddy and rough; they move and
 change like the pattern on the table-rug.

Woman, sweet woman, you are not incomplete.
 Come, look me straight in the eye.
 It's not too late to learn who you are.