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The Silence

One acquaintance says of another,
"I think he's a happy man,"
then pauses.

I see on his face what I also
am thinking,
and wonder what he is remembering,
inside our silence.

I am remembering a funeral,
friend after friend rising to speak
of the lost one.
I did not know him well,
yet still, by one thing he had told me,
wore fully our closeness.

Or perhaps it was even simpler—
to whom else could he say the truth?

I wondered, even then,
how many others attending knew also one thing.
Each secret separate, different,
leading its life now without him:
carrying laundry, washing the windows, straightening up.

As they do, perhaps, I would like to sit down now and rest.

I would like to ponder the flavor
of how much I know of others, how much I do not;
of what of me is known and what is not.

A conversation is overhead on a train, on an airplane,
and even Love cannot know the whole.

It sits in the row behind,
listening quietly to what it is able.
Then the green and red wing-lights blink out;
the train rounds the track's curve and is lost.

Love, also disappearing,
would like to tap the two murmuring ones on the shoulder.
Love would like to say to them,
"Speak more fearlessly—This is the only—Say what you can."

Politeness forbids it.

Love sits in the row behind,
and quietly listens.
Love lowers its stricken face so no one will see.

Jane Hirshfield

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Jane Hirshfield's fifth volume of poems is *Given Sugar, Given Salt* (HarperCollins, 2001); the poem presented in this issue of *Disquieting Muses* is taken from that collection. Ms. Hirshfield is the recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim and Rockefeller foundations as well as the Poetry Center Book Award, Bay Area Book Reviewers Award, and other honors. Hirshfield teaches in the Bennington College M.F.A. Writing Seminars. Recent poems have appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *The Nation*, *The Oxford American*, *Slate*, *The Threepenny Review*, and *Agni*.