FROM THEN ON

I dreamed that I was doing what I was—
lying on my back in bed beside her,
and across the foot of it
there was an edge of light from the bathroom,
and out the closed plate window
it was almost black except for something
dim behind the great pinetrees on the ridge,
a storm was coming, it
was breathless in the ceiling the way it is
when the atoms in a chair move,
and sudden there was a wasp outside the window and I got up
in the dream and it was in the room and the lightbulb
in the bathroom hung from a wire and a long hair
grew down from it and I grabbed it but more hair
came out and I tried to tear it
to the black turn of the stairs below me...
and I was awake then, her hand
was asking what was wrong with my mouth,
and the storm was still coming, and the light
was still on in the bathroom, and I was wet
in every hair and could not stop shaking.

COMMENTARY

I don’t remember my dreams; they’re such an exclusive and absorbing country, they
make the country of wake-up hard to enter and function in, and one must get up.
But the dream that “From Then On” is about was so terrifying I couldn’t and haven’t
forgotten it. At first I couldn’t write about it, a few years later, though, I tried to. I was
so desperate to evoke it, my first version was laced with comment, especially at the
end. The first thing I saw was that the tone of the dream — what made it so real (a sort
of yellow-grey somewhere between a smell and a texture) — wouldn’t come over
into words. The second thing I saw was that if I junked the comment and kept to the
physical details (even left some of them out) of the dream and the sudden waking,
I’d get as close as I could to the tone, and if I used a run-on or breathtaking rhythm