

Miss Marianne Moore

I could get you a pair of socks, I would have said to Marianne Moore,
if my mom had befriended her arranging flowers in a class at BBG,
and invited her over for dinner;
if she had come via subway some snowy winter day in sixty-four,
from the house where she lived with her mother at 260 Cumberland Street,
a few blocks east of the Williamsburg Bank Building, wearing the full-
length mink

she called The Monster (and creamy white kid gloves),
on the four train from Atlantic to the Junction of Flatbush and Nostrand,
and then walked in the downpour of fat wet snowflakes the rest of the way
down Nostrand,
then right onto Avenue I, past the blocks and houses where my childhood
friends lived,
on East 29th, East 27th, East 26th, past Bedford, and then left on 24th
Street,
soaking her feet along the way when she stepped between the humps of
shoveled snow at corners,
in one or more grey slushy pools.

If the icy water there had sloshed inside her rubbers;
and if my mom had met her at the door and said *Come in, Miss Moore*.
How brave to venture out,
and took her black felt hat with the rumpled crown, and took her monster
coat,
the discernible animal smell of which, revived by rain and homey warmth
intrigued our dog, Sandy, who unhurriedly would have waddled out of the
kitchen
with uncut nails across the parquet floor to sniff; and if my mom, ignoring
that,
had pulled the pale blue woolen scarf just halfway up the sleeve and hung
them up;
and if Miss Moore had sat down on the bottom step, and hiked the skirt of
her long black dress
to take her shoes and rubbers off; and if I had been standing there,
just leaning on the newel post, waiting to be noticed while she unlaced
her slender manly wingtips and wiggled the toes on her long white feet,
the seams of her untorn nylons very straight across the gnarly knuckles of her
big toes,

and looked at me, looked up at me, an eight-year-old, still taller as she sat
there than she was;
and if, as she was looking up at me and down that long white nose of
hers, her owl eyes lit,
she'd smiled with her old lady teeth like saws to say *hello*, I would have
said it then:
I could get you a pair of socks.

And if I had, and she had said, *How nice*, and *What's your name*,
I would have said, *I'm Arthur; I'm a poet just like you*,
though she might not have heard me because I might have swallowed
half my words, embarrassed,
as I sprung and leapt, immediate as light, behind her up the stairs
to get a pair of socks for her; and the ones that I would pick,
beyond a doubt, were loosely woven thick grey yarn with a wide red
border at the top,
the socks I liked to wear when I was sick and stuck in bed, my favorites,
nothing less.

And if I had, and then came down, and Miss Moore was waiting for me
with the sweating, clinking gin and tonic mom would make her in her
hand
so she needed help from me to put them on, I would have used the
techniques,
instructed by my father, I had learned, not to drag a sock on by its cuff,
but rather dig thumbs in,
then gather up the calf and heel till all of it was ruched along my thumbs;
and then unfurl those pleats from toe to instep, over arch and under heel,
brushing her ankles with my thumbnails along the way, while she
observed me,
while Miss Moore observed me with her smiling owl eyes lit,
and frankly helped a little, by flexing and pointing at the most propitious
times.
And when I'd done and patted her foot to say *all done* as my mom had
done for me,
then I could say forever that I'd knelt at the feet of Miss Marianne Moore
and dressed her in the socks I liked to wear when I was sick.