

The best way to hold a man is
in your arms.

Mae West

When my mother was quite old she often said, "I have no talents and no friends." "You," she said, "have many friends, I have none". Then an expression, which I remember from childhood and think of as a caravan that has moved on (my brother Ted has inherited this suddenly inattentive expression) told me that it would be useless to mention her friends (still alive and living nearby), because at that very moment they were becoming transparent and vanishing into the realm of those who "didn't measure up"—her own talents at the same moment also becoming insubstantial, drifting behind her like phantoms. As she did have talents and friends, I often tried to imagine what she meant; perhaps, I have thought, she meant a friend of perfect intellectuality, talent and goodness, someone like Pope John whom she greatly revered. But I was wrong (although perhaps not as wrong as I imagine).