

The Step

Mission District, San Francisco

There is a strange prophecy in the transient
asleep on the top step of the mortuary.
Even the undertaker is finished, relocated
to a nicer building several blocks away,
leaving this one to stare out like a skull:
eye-blackened windows, a bony white façade,
and the cold marble step-like mouth.
What matters about this man is not his life—
that he is physically ill, now calls himself Keith,
that his father has looked for him everywhere,
boyhood friends sending out letters like balls
thrown long over a fence—but more specific,
it matters how he came to be here tonight,
how he came to choose this spot for sleep.

Saturday

Night of tall weirdos, night of the big freakout.
If the old man is right, on Saturday night
we walk through a forest of symbols, but
with one eye swelled shut, and we can't hear
the woods for the mumbling trees. On Saturday night
we are accosted by drunks on trams, speaking
the language we do understand: that of drunks
and drunkenness. Tonight all women are witches,
all men are half-blind. On Saturday night our shoes
wear out, and we walk home in a thunderstorm,
the sewers overflowing, though in our minds we wear
black slippers, and what we walk through is sand.