

FOUR POEMS



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THE PALLACE OF MEMORIA GARNISHED WITH
PERPETUALL SHINGE GLORIOUS LIGHTES
INNUMERABLE

It's shut. And after such a climb!
A caustic drizzle slicks the deserted funicular railway
as the lights come on below in the abandoned weekend.
The distant band's just tuning up in the life you missed.
Your beloved dead are back there
getting dressed for their garden parties.
Yours was among the first families of Purgatory.

When you return now to your ancestral gardens
you hear always an orchestra distantly, carefully,
mimicking the rain, or the sobbing of your national bird.
When you enter the deserted manor
you are often met by the police, who recognise you, bow,
and torture you by weeping during their inquiries
as is the custom of your country.

ANNIE

Flicker, stranger. Flare and flicker out.
The life you fight for is the light you keep.
Your task has passed this hour from wick to window.
Fade you among my dead my never-daughter.

Upriver in your mother's blood and mine
it's always night. Their kitchen windows burn
whom we can neither name nor say we loved.
Go to them and take this letter with you.

Go let them pick you up and dandle you
and sing you lullabies before the hob.

NOT KNOWING THE WORDS

Before he wearied of the task, he sang a nightly Mass
for the repose of the souls of the faithful departed
and magicked his blood to bourbon and tears
over the ring, the lock of hair, the dry pink dentures.
Was he talking to her? I never learned.
Walk in, he'd pretend to be humming softly,
like wind through a window frame.

The last I saw of him alive, he pressed me to his coat.
It stinks in a sack in my attic like a drowned Alsatian.
It's his silence. Am I talking to him now, as I get it out
and pull its damp night down about my shoulders?
Shall I take up the task, and fill its tweedy skin?
Do I stand here not knowing the words when someone walks in?

THE YEARS

Penetrar el espejo, you faceless gods,
Slumlords of my heart's four crowded rooms,
Guardians of crossroads, breakers of locks,
Openers of tombs,
Rise up rise up from the floor of this house
Up the veins of my leg like a riptide.
I am bridled and saddled. Enter the stable.
I am yours to ride.

When the windows slammed shut
Through the gang-raped summers
And oilsoaked rags ignited in the dives,
You held us down, Defiler of Dreams,
You struck the matches, you opened the knives.
When the rivet shot
Through my father's boot
And he tracked bloody prints on the factory floor,
You threw him the mop, Degradier of Souls,
You made him clock out, you showed him the door.
And when I lay awake
To the gargling drain
Or the curtain rippled sun across the wall,

You mopped my forehead, Mother of Whispers,
You bathed me in sleep, you let the night fall.

Pick up the phone. I'm alone on the corner.
Fill in my timesheet, I'll help you remember.
Peel my face from the glass, lift my foot from the brake,
Run the film backwards, rewind the tape.

Penetrar el espejo, bastard powers
Of the brick through the window and the drunken kiss,
How could I put any one god before you?
How would I know any world but this?