

THREE POEMS



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REMEMBERING THE NAMES

And then towards the end
you're lying in a titled bed
remembering the names

or trying:
jazz musicians, football players,
that list of what you

breathed like air,
minor British novelists,
1930s Broadway stars,

politicians long since dead...
They're moving in their
strange syllabics

secret in an oily water.
A wrong one rises or swims back,
holds you from the one you want.

You let some sentences go by
that might have once contained them,
try to land them unawares

and once or twice succeed.
The brain is like a
coast of limestone

eaten by the sea
though sometimes still
their names come back

riding on the waves.
And more, you know,
are gone forever

whirling outwards,
off through space,
foreshadowing your own.

QUICK AND THE DEAD

Iambics of the old preamble
arguing with mothers
the phrases that go running back

to when they held your
legs and powdered
the *what you don't appreciate*

the *what you've got to understand*
the *don't care what you say*
and other lines in freer verse

as *in now you just listen to me, sonny boy*
or *I'm just trying to get it*
into your head—with certain breaks for lineation...

as scrabbling round for ammunition
you see her wrap the whole thing up
like sheets turned neatly on a bed

there's just two kinds of
people, boy,
takers and givers, quick and the dead.

THE STORY

the story writes
its own screenplay
high there in the head

where days do not
humiliate
and honesty's not dead

the story quickly
strips her friends
with stories that don't mesh

the story works her
at the edge
of fantasy and flesh

the story won't be
known by those
who'd never risk the high

equivalent
beatitudes
await them in the sky

the story runs
its rituals
powder, spike and spoon

the glossary
of shiny terms
that keeps a life in tune

taste or half-weight
hit or score
smack or rock or shit

the story says
just twice a month
each day she's needing it

a thousand lies
suggest themselves
the only problem's choice

which story will go
better with
the pressure in her voice

the story has
her friends for months
vaguely at the phone

*you hear that J.
O.D.'d last night?
yeah, shooting up alone...*

*heavy shit
from Cabramatta
the fit still in her arm*

the story has
delivered her
a cold and final calm