

## TWO POEMS



*Thomas Kinsella*

### EVENING SERVICE

She called us late with the news.  
Her voice remote, but familiar from a distant time.

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Round one more corner, by old habit,  
we found St Agnes's; the avenue crowded  
to the church doors, with cousins everywhere,  
introducing wives and husbands,  
comparing memories in elderly excitement.  
I looked around for the sister. But no one  
had called us about her. It was always  
himself and myself, born at the same time.

Getting closer to the hour, everyone went in.  
We took our places around the church. Kneeling,  
and sitting back, noticing each other  
here and there; the close relatives nearest the altar.

A young priest appeared, at the sound of a bell,  
from behind the altar, stood behind the lectern  
and started praising the dead as a husband and father  
and for his unassuming life in the neighbourhood.  
He spoke from the throat, consoling the bereaved  
and ending frequent phrases with a pious flourish.

He stepped away to one side and his place was taken  
by a young man, heavy, with a full moustache,  
who spoke directly, son and friend of the dead.  
Others followed, daughters and another son,  
remembering him with fondness, and taking their places  
either side of the coffin.

Lines of mourners  
formed in the side aisles, and approached the priest  
in turn and, turning aside, returned to their places.

The service ended with the gesture of peace  
among the congregation, neighbours turning  
and giving their hands. The girl on my other side,  
with the high perfume, gave me her firm hand.

Down the centre aisle, the sons and daughters  
preceded the other relatives out to the door.  
The congregation, waiting in respect,  
joined at the end of the column as it passed.

Outside, after the family drove away,  
we mixed again in the same friendly confusion,  
saying goodbye, arranging to meet again,  
taking each others' numbers; but suspecting  
it might not be before our next death.

#### WEDDING EVENING

Three women from the North side  
were sitting together in the dark  
on the low Canal wall, looking across.

Our house, at the quiet end of the terrace,  
facing the bridge,  
was quiet again.

Where she stood this morning  
at the front window  
in her white veil. Sara in certainty.