



SIMON PERCHIK

Poems

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Though over the doorway
an old horseshoe clinks
empties inside a single nail

keeping it warm --a small room
a stove, the iron pot
covered with a ceiling

used to a door
that opens and closes
for no reason at all

collects what's around
left out for good luck
then winter

--even in the cold
you sleep on this kitchen floor
with its invisible nails

and creaking side to side
the way the sun is struck
one morning to the next

then back after the burial
--a clear advantage
--you don't give the sun a chance

let it burn as the faint scent
from oak flooring
--you have to make it work.

*

These petals taking command, the flower
pinned down and the work stops
-your breath dragged back

where it's safe and in your lungs
hides the way each sky is named
after the word for stone

for this small grave each Spring
the dirt adds to till suddenly
you are full height, your lips

defending you against the cold
waiting it out in your mouth
-they too want you to talk

to call them by name
say what they sound like
turning away, alone, alone and alone.

*

Both hands and this ink
the way the dead are sheltered
–you fill the pen

with slowly behind
loosen those tiny stones
you still drink from :you write

as if this shovel
had carried away the Earth
into moonlight where mourners

appear underneath your fingertips
as words and rain and lips
–there's always a first time

–the ink would overflow

rush through the lines
left helpless on this page

–you hold on –why not!
–already a fountain
digging for the sky

its unfinished grave
and every evening
is an everywhere her heartbeat.

*

Lifted too close this leaf
fastens on your sleeve and dries
--it must know why one ear
hears sooner than the other
forces you to turn and climb
till there's nothing left
to lose, the sun
worthless, the air
limping, poisonous

--you hold in your arm
what every tree finds too heavy

throws out and even in winter
you pick up from there
crumple your fingers till their bones
want to live at the bottom
but only one recognizes oak
from when the moon fills up the sea
drop by drop and your knuckles
pounding against each other.

*

You lean against the way each evening
fills this sink waist-deep
though the dirt smells from seaweed

and graveyard marble --the splash
worn down, one faucet abandoned
the other gathers branches

from just stone and rainfall
--by morning these leaves
will lift a hand to your face

--you drain the weatherbeaten
the mouthfuls and slowly the mud

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caresses your throat --you go

shaved and the gravel path
sticks to your skin, flowing
half shovel, half trembling.

Poems

*

You can still make out the stars
though it's noon and the beach
changes --you can tell by the feel

and listening for engine scrap
breaking apart, smelling from smoke
expects you to stand up barefoot

keep struggling with shoreline
--you're not new to this
will start the grill weeks ahead

as if stars are never sure
are milling around, forgot all about
the darkness you're breathing in

and no way now to pick and choose
the fires however small or close
to some ocean or daylight

till it creaks and your mouth
no longer lit for kisses
and songs about nothing.

*

The dead are already holding hands
and what's left they share
as memories --in the meantime

who do you suppose makes this tea
and the smoked fish, then room
for the grandchildren you almost forgot

were born later --the dead
are no better at it than you
--they mix up dates and places

though what pins them down
is no longer the flowers
soothed by each other and vague streams

--no, it wasn't you lifting this cup
passing itself off as empty
with nothing inside to unwrap

--from the start the dead form a circle
as if they still expect to sing out loud
and you would hear it, open your mouth.

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Though the flash has left his hair
combed back with hers held down
by iron straps and waiting --the dead

are never ready for a wedding
go house to house, ask for enough
in case you've seen these two

alive somewhere, rubbing their eyes
as if the photographer might set off
another miracle and nothing change

the way every grave goes door to door
as rain --would jam each drop open
alongside all these flowers, smelling

from bare wire, fresh dirt, storms
counting the ones that already
reached the ground and not moving.

*

Empty and the sand
follows you along Broadway
as if some dampness

was left for shoreline
moves the IRT up
then down the way clammers

use their feet to rake
--you walk on tracks
careful not to miss

while the train underneath
breaks open its doors
all at once --no, you don't jump

nothing like that
--these shells are the same
the mad feel for

though their sweat takes the place
water grieves into
and their mouths are the same

let you yell down

and not a mark inside your body
to call you by.

*

All day and your arms
need the smock loose
and white gloves

--this barnacle is the kind
that spirals toward the light
already nurses

on a rock half at anchor
half this kitchen table
--a small loaf and already

ravenous though once it's cut
it begins to circle closer
and what your arms free

is no longer joined at the heart
born over and over

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as twins facing each other

lets you see your own lips
and in the darkness
that belongs to you both.