Poems

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Storm Screen and Siding

It seems to me on a day like this
when memories of last year’s freshening,
like a faint green mist,
slide ankle deep over the corpse of winter and blur
the soot pock ed snow
that there might be reason enough for cracking the window
an inch or two.

Listen, I do not not mean to deceive you
with allusions to sacred transparencies
to birth from decay. To the contrary.
I tell you that
last Spring’s bud will not bloom again,
and if that ash that darkens the snow was once

your father

no Great Potter will spit on the ashes
to knead your father back again.
What was true for our fathers will be true for us
as it always was before. Let it go.
There will be time enough to dust the sill.
You think you see him

beyond

window upon window upon window
laminated with grey spit
looking back at you with eyes
like crocus bulbs and lips of broken ferns.
I’d say, it’s likely only a mirror,
but your teeth bleed dust. So best not
be opening your mouth to tell me again
how the storm and screens are new —
the panes

hermetically sealed.
The earth still bears the scorch marks
As from shadows of passing clouds
Which no longer lower over this land.
A scrap of tin shades me like a parasol.
Behind, the girders of the city
Are blasted limp with the bowed spines
Of supplicant women.
At dawn, their melted questions
May unfurl like ferns,
But in the unrelenting light of noon
Their ragged collapse is the profile of the horizon.

The dust on my upper lip smells
Like the fired red tape from my brother's cap gun.
My mouth is dry and my tongue is tacky.
The water of the River between us is
Undrinkable and treacherous along this loop.
I search across it with eyes of dried mud
From which no shoot can spring. Nor will.

Yet on the bank far opposite, the eddies
Mouth a narrow muddy beach
Overhung with sodden branches
Bowed low by poisonous russet fruits
With thin bursting skins.

There is no timber to construct a bridge.
Perhaps a small buoy of memories
Would float — of the caw of hawks
Extinct on this burnt continent
Or of sweet peppers in oil with charred flecks
And a few seeds clinging to the lips
Of sliced roasted flesh.

Perhaps I could swim.

He searches for me with blind eyes
The color of an Homeric sea
Where heroes drown and
The daughters of kings are abandoned,
Hears the drowning call of a swimmer;
And tosses coins.

Through the arch of his legs
Looms a temple all columned
of fluted marble flawed with black veins
Like the whorls of hairs
On his thighs.

His house is built into the slopes
Beneath the temple's stylobates.
Rain runs down the corrugations
of the tin roof and collects
In cisterns vaguely fragrant of his ribs.

Irises under the eaves
drinking the runoff show
the yellow fur on the undersides
of their tongues.

To enter, I must leave desire at the door
like an umbrella.

For the Kroisos Kouros on Christmas Eve

O kouros of archaic dreams, fists
Sucking light into enormous thighs, just
Your fragile Proconnesian ankles
Veined with black silk hair, just
The back of your colossal marble stride, just
The swollen cold of your stone thumbs.

Apollo's sun's gone black before Bethlehem's star.
A child squalls and stretches
Out His perfect tiny fists
For the nails - shredded
Into tinsel now. Millenia gone,
And no carol, no canticle can
Resurrect the pagan sun, can
Sing in the fluted columnar throat, can
Pry open petrified fists
For the broken fingers of kore's hand.

No it's not marble dust, just
Flour from the Christmas baking
I'm wiping with raw palms down
The belly of my apron, just
The stone quiet of the snow
Sculpting the blacks between us.