

JANE MILLER

from *A Palace of Pearls*

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My dead father always makes me think of living

I mean thinking of him dead always

moving across the sky west to east

until the full moon just breaking over

THE HORIZON IS TOTALED BY CLOUDS

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I've tried to write when I haven't been emotionally crippled

it seems there is no right world for it

I have been a coward

I said yes when I could have said no

perhaps it's as simple as everyone learning to read and write

this is a sinister time for the country

dark political plots

the poets have become the asses of the aristocrats

WE HAVE OUR SECRETS

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Devoting themselves to the shadowy figure

Goya and Caravaggio deracinated art history

were it not for reality they would be forgotten

the world filtered through obsession and emotion has failed

imaginations have failed to shoot blanks

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now Caravaggio has only the bulb of moonlight over his head
and the severed heads of his paintings

I will try to fill in the exposition

I know that has become terribly important

THE LAST DAYS OF AND SO ON

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You set the net so you don't get bitten
you go to bed you photograph and send this image
ten thousand miles a minute
in an act of intimacy
your face is resolute when I view it
you will have conquered the mosquitoes
at a cost of mild claustrophobia
and I see that you
miss me I remember the sleep you are setting off toward
under that net
as we so often left the hard mineral world
together in the desert
for a radiance peopled by innumerable tiny cherub's heads
what happens to angels
is that they get younger until they disappear
the man in bed does not look well in Goya's work
by the side of the bed there is a priest holding a figurine of Christ
whose tiny wooden arm flings a rain of blood across the dying man

I mean no disrespect but in the painting
the blessed and horrible miracle
is more or less the imagination of the painter
there is only death
and the ghouls hanging around Christ
Christ the priest and the dying guy
are dead with the Catholic faith of Old Spain
here where I sit confounded by it
of what value is
my poem my feeling for life my distinctions
and comparisons full of myself as if I were
a priest or philosopher born to think across this water
separating us during which time
people are cut they're frightened
they want to know why they want to know
where they are dying well aware
it is not in this poem
one of them holds her heart while her lungs fill with water
she's old in a moment her face is soft her hair is white
she always wanted to die in her own bed
the imagination is suspect it may or may not let her
when I saw her for the last time
she told me to do whatever I wanted
and to enjoy it and it was all the more poignant

with my old mother standing by waiting her turn
when we were alone again it was clear
my mother was thinking of her friend
she went to shut the blinds at dusk
and when I said I'd like to watch
the sky darken said I don't know you
really since you left home so early
I'd wanted another glimpse of palms
my mother wasn't interested turned inward
she is more real than ever who may fall over somewhere
while I am composing myself executing a minor
lugubrious love poem
when five massive ravens set down their weight
five black oily heavy
otherworldly creatures as if I am dead meat
I ought not to make comparisons
every dying bloom is not a toppled head
humanity escapes naturally through a fine net of sunlight
I THINK IT IS A LOVELY DAY