

the half that let me be stunned when a crow
in one graceful swoop picked clean
with its beak a sliver of a fish
and flew off unshaken in its flight.

What is the resolution of a life gone forever
if what it was wasn't meant to be?
What kind of dignity can be salvaged
when death nears the whisk of a hand?
I drape the window, ending the intimate lighting
and motion you to the bedroom.
There is a sharp breathy sound
I've never heard before, a barren laughter
imperceptible from weeping.
How clear it is. And ceaseless.

WOMEN IN BLACK

In Alicante, during the Semana Santa festival,
you sat alone in a crowded maison, drunk and purple-lipped
from table wine, staring out at the dim esplanada—
the yellow and blue mosaic walkway, a topiary garden—
green elephants, by a trick of light, that seemed
to trudge trunk to tail. Women dressed in black
bearing lit white candles and rosaries walked behind
a mile-long parade where flashbulbs strobed
as randomly as fireflies, where strolling Easter choirs
competed like two stations playing on the same radio,
where the pink and white flowered floats of Christ icons
perfumed the air they wheeled through. In the bay,
small fishing boats had lights strung to their masts.
From the ceiling of the maison hung cured haunches of ham,
chorizo, blocks of headcheese, sausages that gave off
a charred smokehouse odor. A thick cigarette haze
stung your eyes and your wine glass once touched
your lips by surprise, as though it moved involuntarily.

Outside, the long black veils of the women trailed them
like prayers streaming out of their heads
while their rosary beads made their circular rounds.
Almost twenty, you began to think of your life
as a number of wrong choices split into routine shifts
of time: practicing guitar all day, drinking all night,
never learning Spanish more than enough to get by,
each day as steadily uneventful as the next,
just as the beads passing through the women's hands.
You were about to leave when you heard shouting—
two men seemed thrown apart from each other—
one in a red turtleneck yelling *maricon*, queer,
the other, a tiny bald man who grabbed a beer bottle,
smashed off its long neck over the back of a chair
and waved it, beckoning his aggressor toward him.
Before anyone could break it up, the man in the turtleneck
kicked the bald one near the crotch, bending him over.
But the bald man was bluffing, carefully waiting
while the other man laughed and moved closer
until the bottle's torn mouth swung upward in a smooth arc
and gouged off the bulb of his nose.
Somebody draped a white bar towel over his head
which muffled a deep howl and others stood stunned
as the tiny bald man tapped a few flamenco dance steps
holding the bottle high in the air.
You stared into your empty glass, purple
and fingerprinted, not knowing why you stayed
and watched, why the other man's loss made you think
that even you must bear some kind of lasting mark,
some fine scar, only that it remains to happen or be found.
But none of this was clear until you were out on the esplanada,
the women in black a short distance in front of you.
There was the harmonic singing about the rebirth of Christ,
church bells clanging, and as you neared the rear
of the parade, your shoes became heavy, pulling
from the ground globs of wax left from the women's candles,
wax like a trail of warm communion wafers,

and you did nothing but just stand there, gazing out
at the bay where cross-shaped lights
over the fishing boats blinked on and off.

BEYOND LORCA

“A dead man in Spain is more alive as a dead man
than anyplace else in the world,” Lorca said,
and that “throughout the country everything
finds its final, metallic value in death.”

It seems he became the astringent spirit of his words,
the harsh incantatory trill of deep song, but I could
only pretend I felt his words, much less, believed them
until I lived in Spain thirty-six years after he was shot
in the olive grove at Fuente Grande. I had been touring
the Alhambra and Generalife in August, and had descended
the exhaust-choked hill to the Hotel Washington Irving
where lorries took the Cuesta de Gomerez trek in 1936
with men trussed like pigs, to be shot in Granada cemetery.
I walked along this treeless street under two o'clock sun,
one of those almost shadeless afternoons made famous in
the middle novels of Hemingway, with the heat knifing through
awnings and shuttered windows, and everyone at siesta,
napping at home or cooling off in sawdust-floored bars
like La Pajarera, where thirsty, I dipped in for a beer.
No one swapped more than puffs of words at this hour;
there was the matching of dominoes, the pinging ricochet
of pinball, the near passiveness of mass silent prayer.
Behind me a gypsy girl, no taller than my waist, gyrated
a red hula hoop chirping *Americano tonto*, so I walked out
and sat in the shade of a wall edged with bottle shards.
Across the street, a bombed-out stone building, a church,
forsaken since the war, waded in dusty sunlight.
An uncollared Doberman threaded between its torn iron grille
and shattered entablature and hewn beams with the ease
of familiarity, its tongue wagging, its ribs countable.