

**THE OLDEST HANDS
IN THE WORLD**

Poems

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For Fiona and Giacomo—*You are what I cannot write*

Tu non sai le colline dove si è sparso il sangue.

You do not know the hills where the blood flowed.

—Cesare Pavese

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THE OLDEST HANDS IN THE WORLD

I.

LAST VISIT & SUPPER PRIOR TO THE INVASION
ONLY WE KNEW ABOUT

Finally. Dessert. He opened
The shutters and revealed
Everything that would cease
To matter the next day. Alleys
Where men were playing another
Round of chess—accents equally
On time and women parading
Like citrus trees in a market of dates.
Pubs. Songs. Palaces of worship.
No. Not even the orphanage
Or his pregnant wife's gluttonous breasts
Would matter. My host insisted
I spend my time writing the important,
Not the beautiful. *What else can we do?*
He asked. *Continue*, I answered.
And excused myself. All of it.
Except my uncleared plate:
Lemon wheels and spilled milk.

II.

BETWEEN STATIONS OF THE METRO

How wonderfully it all matches the black bough:
Her artificial leg she sways as flesh. Fingers forking
His beard and the thinning images he considers.
A boy's grin held by two cheeks. Fists. Simple
And unprovoked, like our apparitions we share
Each morning, *en passant*, from crests of departure
To whatever we still believe possible. How silly.
How silly to think we all reemerge as petals—pulled
Loose. Bereft of what kept us from the rain.

THÉÂTRE DU GRAND GUIGNOL

Fifty lifeless characters animated.

The audience, astonished, reflects upon the preeminent importance:
A curtain that never falls.

Performance and terror often contain an unconscious existence.

Vacuous eyes

Nonchalantly rising above any great and definite achievement,
While the Playbill attends a memorable ceremony:

A writer's death flanked by language.

The stage conceives a stranger, a sage, matters of occultism,
In an attempt to stimulate man's inner need
To move toward an addressable reality.

But the audience still believes in imitation, nothing more . . .

The applause raucous.

THE OLDEST HANDS IN THE WORLD

On this chair, as I am every morning, waiting
For the cappuccino and brioche to arrive,

And the girl with the oldest hands in the world,
I sense exile is a city reared by eternal artifice.

All sweet violence and thought and repetition.

Beyond what history has left of this topography,
The cup is whiteness, the coffee brown semen.

My first sip makes her appear with provender
And sandals from behind the insignificant ruins.

But for the time being, ruins are eucalyptus trees.
And she not a girl on her way to feed chickens

But a face concealed by dripping nets. Dressed
In black sails and hair dyed a Roman blonde.

The lips of her soul are burning sages, I know.
Her name, I don't. Only her hands matter.

Laden with broached scars, they remind me—
Home is where children sprout in rippled soil.

Where footsteps are mosaics of possibility.

To go on. Finish breakfast. Read the line
That ends in God's breath. Again.

CICADAS IN THE VALLEY OF TEMPLES

for L. Pirandello

Offer the Akragantine men an origin of movement
A nexus with the glorious temples that filter modernity

STREETS THAT END IN YOUR NAME

A city will not remember your name unless you find it in her streets.

But youth unearths its names as pages torn
From a banned text: a scrapbook of stains.

We cannot allow this city to ignore us.

We piss our names on the walls of cathedrals.
Watch how letters seep through history.

When the night seizes its wounds, no one is a stranger.

Beneath the onerous arch, we scorch
Our maps. Sow ashes for the Lost.

Everything is real; nothing can be stolen.

Our legless voices snap an unknown line.
A bough broken across worn doorways.

Have you been hurt? Come and take a close look.

Climb the highest walls. Sit. Drink another
Bottle. Toss it. See it fall. Howl as it shatters.