

Fall 1977

Three Poems

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YOUR WINTER VISIT

Teeth around this house,
the icicles thin, lessen to two feet.
I laugh in the kitchen,
fold the dough over and over

while you talk, watch me fold.
I can be objective: the end
of a long winter, I can be
in the other room where the cold

comes in through a crack, dogs
huddled together. Soon even they
will go in to lie near you,
the stove. I pound it

into the table, fingernails
crusted white, slide it into
the over, notice the sun I say
is good floods the front yard.

But you say tonight it is supposed
to freeze again, and after we eat
the bread, before you have to leave,
after the teeth have time to sharpen,

let's take a walk on ice.

JULY 18TH, THE OLD HOUSE, AND BIRDS

It's a sad night because you're listening
on top of the pickup to the birds.
There's no help for you out there,

your body getting warm from the engine
that was just shut off. I can't
tell you what to do; I can only look
at the ivy going wild from all the new sun.
Maybe you're all right just sitting there

looking at the old barn. Maybe you don't
feel as sad now listening. It might be good

to let night open around you with fireflies,
chamomile, all summer never losing its smell.
And you'll wait listening to the birds

that sing for some reason, out there among
the ripening blackberries, the bordering,

bordering black willows that are dumb
in this dead heat of summer.

THE OLD COUNTRY

for Aunt Mary

You are still in the picture, your arm
about Joshka. Carlji shows you off, his son,
his car. Perushka holds up her prize chicken

she has just killed for you. Your white teeth
stand out from this farm in Androshfar.
Always since your parents died

you wanted to visit their backyards, the country
where people say their last names first,
the vineyard your father gave up to come to

a better country. You wanted to see
where your mother milked her own cow,
to imagine the udder becoming her fingers,

to see the kitchen where she learned
to grind the poppy seeds. Where they fell in love.
It was far from the Danube. You went

and found those geese that knowingly
filed by their back gates. Almost
all of it was there. You accepted the lilac water,

a hand-embroidered pillow. On our way home
you took the polincka, that strong whiskey
your father always said was good

for the soul, and poured it down
a hotel sink. I am in the picture, too,
standing under the chicken. I hold

a glass of red wine out to the camera.
Puzzled, I am looking
at you.