

## Valkyrie's Lament

Wise sir, do not grieve.  
*Beowulf*, lines 1384

I.

I have slipped through unnoticed  
twice this week in my sleep,  
and woke to the door rapping aloud:  
"Lo, there, I see my brother."

II.

Yes, I will call a council-feast  
each man must come bronze-clad and calm,  
a tight-bound tribe from true north:  
one a herald; one who harvests  
mica and shale from sky-words;  
one whose blood whose bone in long  
years will Coltrane yield and Handel –  
and the very concept of Christ, Messiah.  
Each of these the sea will rinse  
in cold-water colors, weave  
to wall tapestry, the torch, the pyre –  
only by such slow offices  
do I allow it: death-flare  
abiding-flame, first-loss.

III.

Brother – I will name the blood-price –  
Einherjar – I will sing the epic catalogue:  
dopamine (how many cc's?); cobalt  
wheezing; a tube; eight monitors (five  
non-trivial); cat scan; lorazepam;  
contagious disease specialist; cardiologist;  
neurologist; lost in all of this –

In shaved-head cell – *one wrist bandaged  
for Christ, the other for you* –

With thin-beat gold – *an amulet, two-sides  
engraved: for me, glory; for you, grace* –

For illumination – *a three-needled liner: I  
will edit you in:*

Bottle-poet, Star-talker, I have a thousand

kennings for you, one-thousand-and-one  
epithets: Light in Armor of Ash and Stone.

## St. Petersburg, 1969

In memory of Dr. Peter N. Lavrenko

*Люблю тебя, Петра творенье,  
Люблю твой строгий, стройный вид  
- Пушкин А. С.*

Yevtushenko lost the Oxford Chair  
to Fuller. I remember *Bratsk Station*  
yellowing on my bookshelf  
and that Sarah said he'd made a pass  
on his way through Syracuse.

How I know so few poets  
and sleep through Stravinsky.  
The way Cyril seared my handwriting  
to church domes and rail lines.  
How I didn't drink Russia until after the vodka

had left me. It's been ten years. Thirteen. I didn't  
buy the Yevtushenko there, but poems  
from a street vendor – and I spoke them,  
despite you: thirty pounds in my bag  
and I bore them from Moscow  
to Peter's city, without Pushkin.

Did I tell you, he snuck me in?  
Boiled beets and cutlets  
on a Bunsen burner at the Polytechnic.  
We lost his birthday glove  
near the Kunstkamera. We went back.  
*I love you Peter's creation.*

I loved your father, too.

## Abba, Father

I

Some cold place again  
and you across the way:  
a stranger, at hands' reach.

This trust is furtive, reluctant.  
Like two bone-heaved orphans  
in a cacophony of scars

we search for *pater*, as foreign  
to our ears as stars. We can

trace out only *never*,  
willful that bodies not  
spin forth

children, for hanging names,  
curses, fists, flesh.

II

She is lovely, a constellation.  
And the room watches.

To them you are *father*,  
the good man, the righteous.

I know this only poem,  
your vulnerable composition  
in bright hair, all whisper

and embrace: the hymn of your death,  
the song that carries your life.

## Bridges, A Refrain

The bridges I want belong to you: *mud* and *burgundy*.  
So I am building, instead, in tinctures:  
I've one of ribbon and one of rosemary.  
I know the streets are a solvent of vinyl and helix,  
but the ratio eludes me. The algorithm, so elegant  
and a little too indignant – I can't quite grasp the tint of it.

A man with hair like heartache carries the hood  
of a car. It is *shelter* and *city* and something  
not dissimilar to silence. Behind them, a woman named  
Gabe speaks into witches: 1, 2, 3-7-5. She's  
a consolation set to the pace of primes.

You settle into a shaft of song. Typeset bottles crumble  
toward daylight. You've been months  
at this, untraveling yourself along  
pinewood petals and the scent of blue.

## **Who, Brother?**

Who, through the nights, read your skin like an old tablet; who blocked the driveway to bend  
over a kitchen chair, empty of all air but your name, your name; who spread your ashes  
and now speeds his body toward nothing, toward where you have gone? And he is gone.

Who, near the shell of you, sat to allow the last ebbing, when even I could not; who now measures  
himself by the rough corners of your room, by door-sill notches that too soon will show the  
passing of six years – six years before he overtakes you? He has overtaken you.

Who knew the stones you hid for me, and left us to dance against the slapping of ivory and shot glasses;  
who sired children with your confessions; who, with an eight-framed monument raised your  
face, your fading face? Faceless as you.

Of all the creatures who gave themselves to accompany your leaving –

– who, open heart?