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## From "A Palace of Pearls"

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JANE MILLER

from *A Palace of Pearls*

1

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

5

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

11

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

152

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

21

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