

*Finishing Joyce's Ulysses on the Bus,
I Want to Bask in My Sin One More Time*

Hellenise it.

-James Joyce

Above the bus's break squeal, the toddler's
Yelp for love or sleep or milk, his mother's cursing

Prayer for the same, Molly's final Yes hangs like exhaust.

I close the heavy, Bible-sized book. No need
To save my place anymore with this photo of a woman

I tried to love once. Now, I'm done.

And now a crimson sea slides behind my eyes, and poppies
Bloom, then burn. I have to take it. My stop will come,

Just over the bridge.

Amazing how all things fit into something small
As a day, God's first splintered image, which broke

His heart. Then ours.

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The last time was late spring. She stretched in a sheer white sundress
Under the lindens and glided my hand

So she might rise, writhe a little, come. Yes,

Because we'd given in, again, because it had to be
The last time. And yes, this is the past,

Where ecstasy turns to violation.

But who was it, really, that stretched her veins
Into our borrowed cosmos of grass and shade?

If you say it was me, then I'll tell you

That climax is not epiphany, but an absence of memory, a void
Of image, that there is only one sign that gives birth

To all the others: some dust gathering on her dog-eared photograph.

Once, this dust cursed its boredom. God loved it,
Felt pity, and slid His finger gingerly inside.

It rose and smiled. But over time, it turned its back on Him.

Desire exiles.

Anyway, it's what this photo tells me.

She's smiling. A blurry close-up: a blue scarf,
A red hat, dark lipstick. Blowing a kiss, it looks

As though she's really waving goodbye.

An orange light, muted, hovers in the back.

Maybe she just finished saying something
About her day or where we had to go or how

The snow just stopped. Something meaningless, beyond cruelty,

Love. No one knows, so I can say anything, almost
Make it true. Yes. I could make up our entire lives together,

All the broken china and shattered picture frames of jealousy
Swept into lingering lines, I could try to catch us

In an image of snow, the way a photographer
Hangs up the day's negatives and waits for them to dry,

How she watches the solution's drops fall as she removes
Her rubber gloves, turning them slowly inside out.

And if it were raining outside, I could convince you
That she started singing, and even though she was tone deaf,

She sounded happy, or sincere. Because I think she almost was.

But you do know, don't you? You know that, in truth,
She was a gorgeous sweep of flesh shimmering

For a second or two, not in the grass, but in a hotel room.

And someone else's wife.

Which is why she rose, and mouthed *Yes yes yes*
As she eased slowly back, away, toward the door,

Then closed it.