



With carols streaming through snow beginning,

Would that make it better somehow?

Would I begin to forget, for example, how I  
Laid you down to sleep, eased you

Into it for years with a cup of warm milk and a little tune

Your grandmother hummed?

There's more to pain than memory.

Besides, ours was another life, the one not set in type,  
And if it were the only life, nothing

Would have happened between us.

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I'm barely thirty, and to talk about this is hard,

Not because of the pain,  
But because I can't remember it enough, so tangled

And torn and fleeting, I feel the old love stirring:

Pleasure is hardly crueler than the memory of it.

So, Reader, stand here with me on this cold corner,  
Just this once, toss your clumsy bags of gifts to the street,

Wrap your scarf around your chin, and look at this woman.  
She's all we need to share.

She keeps waving cars down, yelling.  
Not one stops. But they slow, seem to listen.

And look at the man with the long beard and camouflage coat,  
The tattoos clawing around his neck, and his Doberman

Wrapped in a black smock and silver spiked muzzle,  
How they move a little to the left, and then a little more.

Is it fear?

She must be freezing as she turns

Into angry water, as her curses become the sharp, invisible crystal  
That, if caught in something more than an image,

Would resemble oversized snowflakes,  
The kind children make with paper and scissors.

It's gorgeous how that happens, don't you think?

The Doberman's breath as she curls around her master's feet,  
The crystal streaming from her snout,

The man's *shushes* into her clipped ears,

The laughter of those on the street at the woman,  
or not,

The woman's cursing at what she sees,  
or doesn't...

Their parade of white breath rising with the carolers'...  
Cold, white, gone. Beautiful communion...

Jesus Christ with ice.... Hello, goodbye, and *the stars*  
*Are brightly shining...*

I would give anything to understand why this happens, the marriage  
Of breath and ice, strange couplings and shatterings

Ordained, then abandoned, by wind.

If there were a way I could hold it together,

I'd be writing something different,  
A different kind of love poem, maybe, the kind

Sketched in crystal, one  
I could hold you in, remember you enough by.

2. *Kristallnacht*

Much to their dismay, certain S. S. guards found the female Doberman  
Superior. Their sense of smell was more acute,

More receptive to what we call terror,

Their ferocity more easily triggered by waving  
A wolf's tongue dripping with their pups' blood

In front of their muzzled, spiked snouts.

Then, they'd be let loose to tear you  
Into the crystallized breath you are becoming

Less and less of.

They would tear, and not let go.

And as you ran and jumped and cursed  
Through the alleys of Dinslaken, Munich, Augsburg—

And later Warsaw, Paris, Prague—

Your screams, if your screams rang that far,  
Would become as mute as the effigy

Of, say, Wagner glaring toward Moscow from the Charles Bridge,  
The Vlatava rippling with Nazi U-boats,

Frozen along its banks, where, more than once,  
A man and his grandson unsuccessfully fished.

As you told me this, you began to laugh  
The kind of laugh that refuses to tell the entire story.

In your concealment, I began to understand.

There are things we choose not to say, and there are things  
We cannot say simply, and these words,

You assured me, were not yours. They were your grandmother's.

And still are.

But the more I pay attention to what I remember, the more I slide  
Into your laughter, into my own telling:

“How did we end up at *Kristallnacht*, anyway?  
We were supposed to be breaking up....”

I still wish I knew what to say. You were hushing  
Yourself then because of the listeners, like I’m doing now,

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And as I think *softly*, I’m really speaking out loud.  
About your voice, that is, and the sleet, and the windowpanes shining

With the ice. I can almost see you now behind that fogged window

Marinating chicken in a plastic container. Why?

No one else

Is home. It’s been this way for years.

You stand at the counter, turning over and over  
The meat, the sleet falls, and it’s not much, you think.

The lawyers haven’t called, haven’t written, won’t listen,

And it’s not much. You mutter it softly, *not much, not  
Much*, splintered iambs under your breath until you can’t hear them

Anymore, even though you’re speaking plainly above  
A whisper by now, clearly above the stereo and Bourbon on the rocks

And Camel Lights, which float into their own rhythm, flaming—

*not much, not much, not much*

Echoing down halls we painted blue.  
Ring, and after-ring, ice on glass, and echo again.

No one’s coming home, **not much not much not much**,  
And even here, Reader, the sleet begins to patter trochaically.

I know it’s too much. I know. I know  
it’s been falling so steadily

That it takes on a life of its own in world that unravels

Right next to ours, this world we know  
Where meaning has been banished, where the only law

Is the freezing water of regret kissing sound.

Which means, I'm thinking, there is no law.

Listen—