

CIEL À OULTRANCES

Madeleine Monette

Little

in a jumble she tosses on the bed
a black summer dress, a cardigan
for a more proper look, underwear,
high heels, limp flight of crows,
she collapses on the funereal
heap that should be out of tune
with the beauty of the day

the widow is so little,
her loss so paltry

yet it's devouring her,
insignificant pain for a man
dead in his living room, just one
cut down quietly by surprise,
but the brutality of peaceful
death! torn without a sound
from himself, a glass of wine
at his lips, during his evening
argument with the paper in front
of a sitcom, crept up on him,
a last ambush, lightning swift

on this side of the river,
the wind pushes toward her
a flood of foul-smelling
smoke, it disperses the endless
eruption of ash, long stains upon
a high serene sky, thousands
of bodies gone away in a great
roiling of clouds, which part
when they reach the open sea,
spread diluted, gloomy trail
to a gap of twilight far away

at the funeral parlor, flowers
have embalmed heavy and sweet
a coldness of wax since yesterday,
this little that remains of him,
the urge she has to hug his head,
raise it in her breath, too cruel
this mask to cover with kisses,
at the end of sickening desires,
pallid ugliness of familiarity

be brave! do not cancel,
Madam, the studied slowness
of bland sympathy, do not
put off the removal of the body,
the undertaker knows about
sadness, the actor in him crushed

friends and family will be there,
come now! the ceremony
will be your finest gesture,
the streets around here are open,
and the cemetery at 11:30...
does he hear himself? hollow
obstinacy or strained kindness

the viewing, the procession
to the crematorium, services
essential to whom? everything stops
mutilated, everything closes and flees
in a great convulsion to the west,
where tails of comets are born, flights
of half-light mingling, sacred soot

the eulogy barely finished
many times rewritten, noisy
late awakening, whiplash
of a love letter, she fumes
at the narrowness of the rituals,
blame fate, curse it? no... she
doesn't have such arrogance,
her anger fails her

an unshakeable shudder,
thought freezes in the calm
surreal chaos, neither rules
nor times hold, gray hemorrhage
sandy gears, resigned desolate
breakdown, after the bodies
dragged off in dry tidal waves,
scattered in stelae of countless
shooting stars, a husband
with a clean bite to his heart,
this death that doesn't measure up
on the margins of the epicentre,
rests in the cocoon of a rented
coffin, leaden emptiness
before the urn in her hands

she dresses facing the bed,
for that love with its ecstasies
long ago rounded off,
that they let run on with no
illusions other than a tenacious
intimacy, devotion borne by
breaches in time and pockets
of memory coming unsewn,
she puts on her underwear
still twenty years old for him, legs
smooth and white, then thirty
forty, the whole gamut of the ages
that ill-treated her little by little,
peachy inside worn outside,
bodies are fragile, there especially
the petals beneath the ruins, between
tangled blades, remains of breaths
fused with red-hot iron

in loose circles
on the edge of their chairs,
they turn and glance
bereaved at the door,
indulgent of her tardiness,
will she come?... uneasy
at being there without her,
embarrassed by this ill-timed
private tribute, with tears
to be shed for so many
others! she pales
for her own tragedy,
serene in comparison,
ordinary heroism
and quick conclusion,
warmth of sorrow

may the morning pass!
stop rolling over her
with this shadow of regret
for her stolen mourning, quick
someone rescue her!

he puts his arm around her waist
in the exile of their bedroom,
takes her to fill with ashes
a small urn to bury
under a wide sky of ashes

he escorts her to his funeral

little the widow, so little
the urn, from this man she
is still learning

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