

Sisters

Illustration: JAKE TILSON



Paul Donnelly

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For Christine and Karen

*"I made her from the depths of all the things
that are dearest to me, she's something
I don't understand"*

Pavese

my silent sister

my silent sister returns
to the broken terraces
of this winter city

her face a calyx of light
in the abandoned dark
she guides me

scarcely moving
through cold apartments
to the music of dust

sometimes she visits me
and woken by faint weeping
I see her by my bed

I am the mirror which receives
but cannot keep her

she lives in a white room
with the sepia sisters
whose names
she has never known
and tries to recall
a time when
there were no voices
in her head
she does not know
what they are trying
to tell her
or why
it sounds so urgent
sometimes it's just like
her name chanted
again and again
but most of all
she cannot bear
the small hurt voice
which sometimes cries
beneath the rest
asking them to stop

she wakes
in winter sunlight
to trees luminous
with prismatic snow
her eyes full with
the colour of laughter

she goes out
into the white avenues
where children and small birds
play the games
she would like
to join in with

her jeans
are wet around her ankles
but she is happy
and inside her song
corresponds perfectly
to the music of children and snow

haunting

her face
is a shade of memory
that will not be erased
something peripheral
drawn to consciousness
to illuminate briefly
a sense of implacable longing
in this way she returns
to disturb the settled blood
with brilliant ephemeral pain

her touch would annihilate

still life

candles invest tapestries
with pallid warmth
cast shadows
in the long room
where she watches
blind men at chess
her eyes reflect
still darkness
and between each move
she imagines
her immaculate hands
shrunk to bone
entwined with whitening flowers
from a lover
she has never known

messages

in the white seasons
of her loneliness
she finds brief messages
carefully written
in a language
she does not understand
though the papers stale perfume
is curiously familiar
almost comforting

and often
in the sadness
of deserted nights
she reads again
those other messages
wrought in the slow movement
of wax and shadows
before returning
to her perfumed room
of white paper

dance

reflections
in a tall mirror
meet her
each day

the same
solemn lady
with lost eyes
dances
before her
enchanted
in the silence

sometimes she stares
far into
and beyond
the lady's eyes

but what
she sees
she cannot name
and she has not
yet found
a language
to free the lady
from the dance

julienne

i. *her voice*

her voice
crosses evenings
of piano rain
seeps behind
the splintered mirror
gently persuading
the broken faces
to read
your forgotten letters

ii. *return*

your sadness
draws her back
as the light
gives way to shadow
and you know
you've lived too long
with the sound
of an empty room

'
iii. *moonlight and rain*

through each lonely
quarter of
 the night
your hands touch
only your own body
and you kiss the profile
of that ghost
which has drained you
to a zombie
shadowing through
the city's network
of cold stations
your breath
heavy under winter
your heart
still driven to follow
moonlight and rain

iv. *memento*

traces of her perfume
in the freezing air
as the winter light
falls upon damp pavements
and you realise
you must always carry
the scalding
of her warm tears
on your cold heart

v. *dawning*

waking again
in a loveless bed
to the hush
of white winter
you cannot be sure
if you dreamed her body
or if she really lay
beside you
only the bitterness
waking inside you
says she is the one
you can never possess

MERSEYSIDE POETRY MINIBOOKS SERIES

PAUL DONNELLY

Born 1953 Liverpool, now exiled in unheard-of village in West Lancashire. Has been writing since the early 1970s; work in many UK and USA magazines since 1977. His other collections are *Laughter from a Blue Cage* and *This Winter City* (both Blue Cage Publns).

He is married with one daughter.

Charming but chilly observations of the mysterious female - Magma

An intensity of feeling balanced against an economy of language and image - Doors

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