

1972

Cain

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CAIN

When the shophells tingle,
making the musty air shiver
and crack,
out of some inner mouth he comes
to hover vaguely
behind frayed lamps
and the crumbling mounds
of books.

Whatever the thing chosen,
the curled, arthritic fingers
slowly caress and then—
with a limp reluctance—
yield to your hands.

Long ago
the mark on the high forehead
has faded away—
along with the straight back
and the proud, blue candor
of his eyes.

Though children tell
of standing outside the screen
on summer days
and hearing voices within
quarreling—
one known,
 one strange.

When the wind is right one dry November dusk
and the bells gone deaf with clamor
he will vanish—
curl up behind some bureau in a dusty corner
like a huge spider
 and vanish—
still held
in the protecting hand of God.