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Clanking to Byzantium

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Clanking to Byzantium · *Ellen Gilchrist*

for Gwen

This is no country for old women,
the young in one another's lyrics
guitar picks all over the place,
joints for breakfast, joints for dinner,
more joints. His young shoulders,
sweeter than wisdom. So much
for theories, so much for understanding,
so much for knowing better.

A full moon, that old betrayer,
covers me in silver armor, soft
as pale blue Cannon sheets, softer
than bad poems, some armor.

Joy, that old pimp, shuffles away
while this boy moves,
as I foretold,
across my balcony,
across the room
and opens and closes
the inevitable door.

Oh, my quick clever compadres,
my candid friends, see what I've learned
from Ingrid Bergman, how I stand, coiled
and still, balancing on one foot. So much
for fame and its rewards, so much
for tenure, so much for star billing.

Oh, well, as Anne says, I'll save myself,
plant both feet on this balcony I would
never dream of diving from, turn back
to the work, to the heart's stone. So much
for being a pussy, so much for being
a sparrow, so much for going soft around
the edges.

Here is how I pray. Bill Miller Jim
Boogie Otto Ginny Merlee Fu
Drew Pierre Rita Roy Brenna Tree
Jeannie Rose Gwen Patsy Forche
James Genn Jordan, the names of my friends
fall from my lips like music.
Oh, compadres, if I could resolve this poem
the mountains would call on me for wisdom.