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Victoria

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JULIA HARTWIG

Victoria

Why didn't I dance on the Champs-Élysées
when the crowd cheered the end of the war?
Why didn't I throw myself into the arms of the sailor
who walked down the gangway with a duffel on his arm
and ran toward me through the excited crowd
as raging sounds of be-bop
the *Marseillaise* and God Save the Queen
blared from all the loudspeakers?

Why didn't I break out a bottle of champagne
next to the two of them still dressed in English uniforms
not guessing one day I would stand at the end of their road?

Why was I fated to be on the main street of Lublin
watching regiments with red stars enter the city
crying with joy I would no longer hear the hated *Raus!* and *Halt!*
but torn by sadness this was the price for the lost dream
of a hero's triumphant entry on a white horse
for the return of those who twice cheated
didn't want to come back

So we entered—those who survived—
the streets of Warsaw transformed into a desert
and today years later find ourselves
in the faded films of old newsreels
hard to recognize