

VOICES
FROM THE
OTHER SIDE
OF DEATH



**ARIEL
DORFMAN**

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Recovering the past, creating the future

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These poems are for Angélica, who speaks to me day after day from life, and for my mother and father who, from beyond death, speak to me in a different way. With thanks to them for incessantly giving me birth and the consolation of poetry.

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Prologue

Remembering How I Stood in Front of the Statue of Notre Dame De La Consolation at the Église St Germain-des-Prés

Did you change his diapers, My Lady?

From where did you get the cloth, the tender scraps of your own skirt, did you tear up your husband's cloak so the boy would not cry from the rash?

Did you go to the stream at dawn for water to wash him well?

Did you wince when his first tooth emerged from the succulent darkness of his mouth?

Did you teach him about fire and when to avoid it and when to use it well? And nails? Did you tell him to avoid nails lying around in your husband's carpentry shop, nails that could hurt his fingers, nails that could be hammered into the palm of a hand?

Did you know nothing could shield him? The other boys, the other lads, in the street and at the school, did you know that once he was out of your sight, the world would be cruel with him as it was cruel to so many of the unprotected? Did you know that time and rashes cannot be stopped, that fire and nails cannot be stopped, that there would be no scraps of cloth at the end, when

the blood finally flowed, no water from the stream, no surcease or medicine that stems the tide?

I do not believe in God, My Lady.

And yet, who can I turn to, where am I to seek comfort in this age where birth is ever more difficult for us all, hurtling towards the apocalypse that the child had come to avoid, where women like you die in the streets, under the bombs, inside the ignorance, and the boys and girls are left behind to face the fire and the hammer and the hand, and pestilence rages like a prediction of walls and what is to come for us all.

I do not believe in God, My Lady.

But my mother is dead, and she cannot protect me.

She did what you did for him, for your child, and it was useless, there is only the darkness ahead and below.

And all I can do, these centuries later, is to pray that the light I have invented, the words with which we have all been blessed, will sweeten the death that fast approaches for me and all the mothers of the world.

ONE

SOME SORT OF MEETING

“diciéndose que al fin y al cabo algún encuentro había, aunque no pudiera durar más que este instante terriblemente dulce. . . .”

(telling himself that when all was said and done some sort of meeting was possible, even if it could not last more than this terribly sweet moment. . . .)

Julio Cortázar, *Hopscotch*

Pablo Picasso Has Words for Colin Powell from the Other Side of Death

Yes, even here, here more than anywhere else,
we know and watch what is going on
what you are doing with the world
we left behind

What else can we do with our time?

Yes, there you were, Mr. Secretary,
I think that is how they call you
there you were
standing in front of my Guernica
a replica it is true
but still, my vision of what was done
that day to the men to the women
and to the children to that one child
in Guernica that day in 1937
from the sky

Not really standing in front of it.
It had been covered, our Guernica,
covered so you could speak.
There in the United Nations building.
So you could speak about Iraq.

Undisturbed by Guernica.

Why should it disturb perturb you?
Why did you not ask that the cover
be removed
the picture
be revealed?

Why did you not point to the shrieking
the horse dying over and over again
the woman with the child forever dead
the child that I nurse here in this darkness
the child who watches with me
as you speak

and you speak.

Why did you not say
This is why we must be rid of the dictator.
Why did you not say
This is what Iraq has already done and undone.
Why did you not say
This is what we are trying to save the world from.
Why did you not use
Guernica to make your case?

Were you afraid that the mother
would leap from her image and say
no he is the one
they are the ones who will bomb
from afar
they are the ones who will kill
the child

no no no
he is the one they them
from the distance the bombs
keeping us always out of sight
inside death and out of sight

Were you afraid that the horse
would show the world the near future
three thousand cruise missiles in the first hour
spinning into Baghdad
ten thousand Guernicas

spinning into Baghdad

from the sky

Were you afraid of my art

what I am still saying

more than sixty-five years later

the story is still being told

the vision still dangerous

the light bulb still hanging

like an eye from the dead

my eye that looks at you from the dead

beware

beware the eye of the child

in the dark

you will join us

the child and I

the horse and the mother

here on the other side

you will join us soon

you will journey here

as we all do

is that why you were

so afraid of me?

join us

and spend the rest of eternity

watching

watching

watching

next to us
next to the remote dead
not only of Iraq
not only of

is that why you were
so afraid of that eye?

watching
your own eyes sewn open wide looking
at the world you left behind

there is nothing else to do
with our time

sentenced to watch
and watch
by our side

until there will be no Guernicas left
until the living understand

and then, Mr. Secretary,
and then

a world with no Guernicas

and then
yes then

you and I

yes then

we can rest

you and I and the covered child.