

## THE SECOND GATE

At some unspoken word,  
the gate swings back--  
and there they are--  
a crowd of smiling faces  
whom I know, or seem to know,  
whether known or not before,  
who have come to welcome me in.

Kind words  
are poured on my head like oils.  
There is a baptism of hands,  
and I move inside  
in a shower of offerings--  
not useless things like jewels,  
but an undershirt of silk  
to warm my back,  
a balm to shield my skin  
from too much sun,  
and a heaped-up bowl of fruit  
to stave-off hunger.

With interwoven arms we move  
in an orgy of brotherhood  
down a broad, glittering street  
that is all made up of singing,  
till we reach the end at last, and stop  
at another gate,  
and a path winding up to a house  
far up, hidden.

And suddenly--I'm alone.

There's a beggar before the gate  
with squinty eyes,  
and a hard, bitter mouth.

Before he asks,  
I pour down all my gifts  
before him. He scowls,  
and ruffles through the pile  
like trash, only pulling out  
one small, heart-shaped locket

with an arrow through the heart--  
and a pain pierces me,  
and I'm seized by a huge,  
an overwhelming sadness--

and I fall to the ground,  
weeping--

and that other gate swings back.

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