

CHRISTOPHER JANE CORKERY



LOVE
TOOK THE
WORDS

poems

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CHRISTOPHER JANE CORKERY

S L A N T



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For Eamonn, and in memory of his father

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I



AS IN THE DAYS OF THE PROPHETS

Love took the words right out of my mouth.
Not the making of love, the clinging and plunge,
the tongue's deep spiral, but the acts of days,
the sun up and down, the dish and the pot,
the light on the head of first one, then another,
the stairs unswept, the bed made, the light out,
the papers brought in, the bed cold, the money
paid out, the bulbs dug, the children reverent
at what came next, the rise and the fall
of coral and ocher, the folding and sorting,
the endless numbering of things, the walking
with babies in slings, in backpacks, in strollers,
then hand in hand, then the hand dropped,
and one of them next to my shoulder, eyeing
before I do, the hawk or the waxwing,
the junco, the hermit thrush in the depths
of our gun-shot city, and just to the south
the great hill we climb, by season, together,
alone, in pairs, in trios, the slapping
of mud from our shoes on the back steps again,
the chastening memory of the otter plunging
in the icy water of his adequate tank
at the base of that hill. And love made the otter,
love made the mud, the ice-slicked bark,
the meals, the shining heads, and the sleep,
the risings, the children, the hawk's spiral.
Love took the words right out of my mouth.

HAPPINESS

The two-year old holds a broom, as if a guitar.
He is not far from a place in the stars
Where music is air, food, and water.
The two-year old plays his guitar

And feels the broomstraws brush his fingers.
One day he'll feel the curl and bristle
Of his girlfriend's hair. They'll sit, entwined,
By a river and watch, there, on the water

Swans twirl. It's only May
And the dark asters that will command
His grief in later years are only
Buds. He'll think he is a swan

Upon the water (for they are young).
And she, too, a swan, but something
More. Then that thing's gone, an air
Played, somewhere, under stars.

Yet where? For stars are everywhere.
And to some they always speak, and the man
Always will think, whenever he holds
His guitar, thus, between chest and arm,

Of his first happiness, of the girl, of his sure
Baby grip, and the flick of his fingers.
It was happiness, next to a window he could not
Yet see out of, but which his mother

Had polished, and left, full of stars.

THE STRAPS OF THEIR SANDALS

Who is my mistress?
Who leads me when only
Rubble is left, fragments,
We say, three words or four?

Klio your sandal

But what if

Klio your sandal

Is as beautiful as

The small white statue

Of Zeus that the other

Poets have honored

Klio my verse

Will save you forever

Your thick hair the color

Of Patmos's olives

Your skin as pale

As the sands of Delos

I lay there, a woman
Of the twentieth century.
I was white as a bone,
My life seemed as small
As a grain of sand,
And it was, and it is.
I have borne children, two sons,
Loved a daughter.
Will they be fodder?
Be found, millennia hence,

Bronzed, as corpses
A poet could sing,
Trapped in miasms of lava,
And no one to know
The sturdy beauty
Of their hands and their feet,
The straps of their sandals,
Their bodies lithe
And trusting, their eyes
As brown as the olives of Patmos,
Their ready laughter astounded
When sorrow came in and nailed to a tree
The wordless articles of evil?