

When the Mask Opens

Inside the raven's mouth
an ancient man's face is carved,
capturing the moment he wept
tears potent enough
to put us here forever.

Whatever we call ourselves now.
Whatever we will call ourselves.
It was the ancient man inside the
raven's mouth, driven by loneliness
to despair, who put us here forever.

A man standing at his window
is looking through years
at the dancer flipping open
the raven mask, only in
quick glimpses at first. Then,
at the end of the dance, down
on his knees, the dancer
leaves the mask open,
the raven's mouth agape,
the ancient man's face
forever in anguish

The man knows that he can't
look through all those years
and remember everything
about being seven and seeing
a dancer perform in accordance
with the mask he wore. Only with
the dull and clumsy prodding of
the adult mind can he recall
the place of dance that rotted
and was burned down, or was
burned down before
it was humiliated by rot
in the times of vast poverty.

Yet when a raven looks at him,
head cocked, from a tree outside
his window, he tries to remember
or to recreate the earnestness in him
from years ago when a similar raven
looked from that very tree and
the boy wanted it to open
its mouth so he could see
what was inside.

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Taking the Names Down From the Hill