

the balance due. As soon as tobacco leaf is hanging to dry Reverend Father takes me on a ferry, then a ketch, then a boat and bundles me between his boxes of books and food. The second day it becomes hurting cold and I am happy I have a cloak however thin. Reverend Father excuses himself to go elsewhere on the boat and tells me to stay exact where I am. A woman comes to me and says stand up. I do and she takes my cloak from my shoulders. Then my wooden shoes. She walks away. Reverend Father turns a pale red color when he returns and learns what happens. He rushes all about asking where and who but can find no answer. Finally he takes rags, strips of sailcloth lying about and wraps my feet. Now I am knowing that unlike with Senhor, priests are unlove here. A sailor spits into the sea when Reverend Father asks him for help. Reverend Father is the only kind man I ever see. When I arrive here I believe it is the place he warns against. The freezing in hell that comes before the everlasting fire where sinners bubble and singe forever. But the ice comes first, he says. And when I see knives of it hanging from the houses and trees and feel the white air burn my face I am certain the fire is coming. Then Lina smiles when she looks at me and wraps me for warmth. Mistress looks away. Nor is Sorrow happy to see me. She flaps her hand in front of her face as though bees are bothering her. She is ever strange and Lina says she is once more with child. Father still not clear and Sorrow does not say. Will and Scully laugh and deny. Lina believes it is Sir's. Says she has her reason for thinking so. When I ask what reason she says he is a man. Mistress says nothing. Neither do I. But I have a worry. Not because our work is more, but because mothers nursing greedy babies scare me. I know how their eyes go when they choose. How they raise them to look at me hard, saying something I cannot hear. Saying something important to me, but holding the little boy's hand.

white phosphorus

Alice Notley

1988

"Whose heart" "might be lost" "Whose mask is this?" "Who has a mask, & a heart?" "Has your money?" "been published, been shown?" "Who can & can't breathe?" "Who went" "to Vietnam?" ("We know who died there") "This was then" "is now." "Whose heart?" "All our heart" "the national heart" "Whose mask?" "has its own heart?" "A mother's" "mask" "Whose money?" "do we mean?" "A woman's money" "Woman's money" "Who went" "to Vietnam" "& just died of it?" "A son" "Evolved" "a man" "evolved" "a woman" "into America" "into the" "just before now" "It was just before now..." "When men made the forms" "& women made the Air" ("& now no one does that, & who can breathe now?") "Who cares, in the Air?" ("All our poems, women's were there," "there, too invisible" "and now" "become male" "acceptable") "Accepted." "And they're welcoming us" "among" "their forms" "among their forms only" ("what forms might we have made?" "which ones did" "we make?") "Whose heart is lost?" "oh not mine, & not my darling's" "Or only our whole heart?" "not mine, & not my warrior's" ("has your money?" "been accepted?") "And this is what happened," "he went to a war" "old style, he went" "to that war" "No one cared" "that he went there" "as no one cared" "what was lost" "with our air"

"no magnanimity" "to an enemy" "no feeling for what" "is invisible" "for magnanimity" "for what's lost" "to air, in air" "As if nothing replaced chivalry, not something" "invisible" "but nothing" "No one cared" "what was lost" "with our air" ("All the forms were already" "men") ("politics, a man" "philosophy, a man; a building a" "painting a poem, a man" "science, a man") ("Now, we can all" "be men") "This

is what happened." "She is a mother." "This is what happened."

"Or she could be a lover" "or a sister" "This happened" "Find green air green breath" "Later, he tries to become" ("did he become") "air, air, as again" "This is what happened. And she's trying" "to breathe" ("the mother") "And she's trying to wash" "to wash off" "America" "from herself" "But what" "is a mother" "now?" "In America,

everyone is else" ("else" "aside" "aside from their" "whole heart has crumbled") ("take your own small heart, own heart & go") ("& breathe" "try to breathe") "Who is she? and who" "is he?"

"Whose mask is this?" "Whose heart might be lost to the" "bigger heart" ("not his nor hers but") "whole country of heart" "might be lost"

"to the bigger heart" "biggest heart" "heart of the universe" "heart that

might not give it back" ("we maimed" "another, a native land, we" "helped main, another") "Please" "give it back" "Give us our heart, whose" "heart might be lost."

"Flowery mantle." "Homeric sacrifice?" "noise of darkness" "fear of darkness" "now mantle of innocence" "King of his death now" "Home" "I've come home" "He said, 'I've come home'" "They were sacrificed for nothing, for distant" "instants of thought" "All for your thinking" "He said, 'I've come home; I've finally come home then he died'" "flowers"

"Magnolias & lilies" "innocent now" "I've come home. Who's there? at home? all the dead?" "To come home from the war" "years after" "To die" "To wear mantle light honey" "mantle dead white" "in sunlight, in late" "Homeric?" "he said it was hideous" "all of it" "hideous" "every instant in Nam" "theatre of worsts" "now mantle of

white" "phosphorus & lilies?" "trees now lean down" "over our faces"

"Tell details of battle?" "As" "in an epic?" "As" "in lies?"

"We don't want that now" "We want only our mother of dirt" "our mantle of white" "want each other of soul; and"

"we want" "our mother of spirit" ("rich sweet in dirt") "we want"

"our father" "of leaves" "We want our fate fragmented to air for

our children to breathe;" "light on water for widows to think near"

"moonlight on water to ease you" "we want no poet, we want our

homes in the earth" "that's all we can have" "want no place in

history or poetry" "want our wanderings our sorrows, after the war,

not remembered," "we want not

to pain her" "we want our love mingled" "with yours" "no place in history" "only in love" "remove us from history," "All of us sacrificed" "all for a thought" "They played with our souls." "Used our souls to fight, be their willfulness" "willfulness" "we were made their willfulness," "nothing but that--" "And you too, you yielded, one way or another" "to their will." "They" "who are the subject" "of all history" "& of poems" "as if"

"we have ever, in all ways" "yielded to them" "by speaking of" "always speaking of" "Kings" "presidents" "the Great Men" "their mistresses" "Generals" "Communist Kings" "Leaders" "Warriors" "West Point of Greeks" "West Point of Greeks against" "West Point of Trojans" "Isn't it more beautiful, under the Earth?" "Or to be sunlight, not history?"

"Now I can love, & only" "now" "Remove us from history but not from your air" "History is willfulness" "is" "precious parts"

"History's for those" "who ask not" "to be forgiven"

"We ask to be forgiven" "& loved" "No, we ask" "to be absolved"

"And to be" "elemental" "ask leaves & wind"

"Ask leaves bending down towards our faces" "Ask light & dirt" "we ask"

"our children" "we ask our wives" "Ask that they live" "We ask

to be" "with the ones that we killed" "To history" "saying nothing"

"being that" ("nothing") "& to history" "having been" "nothing."

"In this moment" "before" "anyone, ever" "died" "before we were born?"

"In this moment forever before" "before we went to a war"

"Before we died" "In this moment, now" "In this moment before, it is

not before" "In this very moment" "where is it" "where we

haven't died" "or died inside" "In this moment we haven't" "in this

moment, no one" "in this moment, no one has ever, died" ("But I have

been born") "in this moment" "where, where is it" "in moment" "who's here"

"Catch it catch it" "moment where we are" "merely as it is autonomous,"

"autonomous moment" "Without a war" "without a guilt."

"Can we exist" "Outside of what was?" "in the air of our thoughtless,

female, moment" "the air of our moment" "not grievous not iron"

"moment, not air" "but air of our moment" ("woman-made?") "faithful,

faithful & boundless" "reticent & light" "fond, & kindly" "not reticent

but shiny," "morning-starry, not bloody" "not bloody, in the morning"

"in the star" "it is a star" "it is autonomous" "star & it's mild" "Is

it a little" "of us" "from before" "we were born?" ("that was

never") ("I know") "It is now" "autonomous" "moment of white,"
"white flowers, stars & white flowers," "not before we were born, in

this moment our childhood" "have we our childhood" "in
this moment he has his childhood, I think, it is center of"
"moment, of childhood" "center of, moment" "wings of his pigeons" "white
& grey wings" "moment a feathery" "center of senses" "center of
sensation, is this moment" "Center, as sensation falls away"
"He has his love" "this moment" "forever" "center of brown eyes"

"seen through his eyes" "Only through" "the eyes" "the real eyes"

"of the dead" "this moment" "through his eyes" "as child, as

childhood" "Only through" "the personality" "can this be" "of the

dead" "the lovely person" "holding" "this moment" "this moment in

place" "this moment forever" "center of sensation" "Soldiers,

we are center" "of the morning" "we are moment" "we are dearest"

"we are heart" "Soldiers," "we are pleasing" "we are center"

"we are moment" "are not soldiers" "never soldiers" "never were."