

Patrick Donnelly

THE SECOND GOING

My first death I acted in a play,
hoping my false hair would stick till the curtain,
trying to breathe invisibly and squint
past my eyelashes up to the deep fly,
up to dusty drops the Masons hung
to decorate their ascent by weird degrees.
I could make out a forest, a grotto,
a palace where peacocks shrieked
in the moonlight. It was a relief
after so much fencing with dull foils
to rest and hear voices resolving conflict
from a distance, the last little bits of dialogue;
to listen for the calls and applause
that would raise me up like Lazarus,
twenty nights, until the show went dark.

This was years before the twenty nights and days
I watched at your bedside,
wiped cold sweat off your neck,
lifted your head to take a drink,
looked hard at how the thing was done.

Now when my real time comes, dear critic,
I'll tune every gesture as you taught,
the thousand small details of my performance,
instinct with life itself—
there! you'll cry, *that dying fall,*
an artist in every cell.