



THE BALLAD SINGER

Sunlight, move softly in this room.
 Touch the worn carpet, the table,
 The doily on it,
 The teacup, and the little book of sonnets.
 Kindle with March beams the bowl
 Of daffodils, and in the corner glow
 On the canary perched there like a tropic fruit
 Strange in a winter land. Shrill and high
 His penny-whistle song
 Flickers across the room to join
 The worn piano, faintly out of tune.
 My fading fingers touch the aging keys
 (My touch uncertain now, and once so firm)
 And now I sing, where there are none to hear,
 The ballads that I loved when I was young.

"A ship I had
 In the North Countree
 And she went by the name
 Of the Golden Vanity" . . .

Once there were minstrels,
 Now only such as I
 Who wistfully recall
 An age they did not know,
 A stronger age, grim, sinning, bold, beautiful.
 Now in the dim spring light
 Through this poor room,
 Four tiny walls, and an old voice singing,
 Pass bloody knights, the ladyes that they loved,
 Incestuous lovers,

Foully murdered kings,
 Warriors with ruddy swords,
 Bowers, and sinking ships,
 Brave deeds, and kisses from a true love's lips
 "Out of his grave grew a red, red rose,
 And from her grave a brier" . . .

But what have I to do with songs like these?
 Merely a pastime, nothing more.

Quiet my life has been, respectable,
 Here in this sheltered street, this pretty room,
 My canary, and my singing, and my books—
 Life is not unhappy, so I sing.
 Lightly the sunlight slips across the room . . .
 The ballads busy me all afternoon.

— Margaret Anne Doody



Where Are You Going?

Out - -

he said.

Quietly and efficiently

he spun the wheels to freedom.

As he stepped beyond

the lead-swaddled hatch
 a second's glimpse made me visionary:

Forest trees shifted as do waves

before an offshore summer breeze,

the sun's floating gold glittering
 on flaky tips.

And gay couples

fled slowly hand-in-hand through this
 too lovely landscape, breathing fresh
 the spotted air.

The hatch had shut,

and he ran laughing to a mottled death.

Haiku.

The tree stood alone

And the crumbling stars stared down

Upon a dead world.

— Douglas Barbour