The telling
by John Haines

I

There is one and only one
So was your fortune told,
as the palm reader scanned
the past, the present
and future, and then went on
in the telling
of an inexplicable journey.

II

I see lines that cross,
that travel together
and seem to part again.

I see a large flock of birds
circling a single figure,
and somewhere nearby
a small burial is taking place,
with the sound of dirt
hitting a cardboard box.

And once more the lines converge,
are thickened with grieving
and unexplained departures.
I see a forest path; beside it
a waterfall, and someone
diving repeatedly into a pool.

I see a house, divided by many rooms. Three children are searching the hallways and opening doors; they enter a smaller room and vanish into another country.

I see honor and happiness there.

And you and I were together there, waking and sleeping, speaking the names we were given, as if we did not know each other well, but our souls did.

I see how it all combines and reassembles, completed in this one unfailing image—a woman telling fortunes, casting the future in someone's open palm:

œThere is one and only oneœ

III

The forest path is empty.

That house and its people, the search and the children's story, dissolve to an open park where someone is throwing a ball at the root of a tree; others, silent and grouped at a distance, are keeping score.

And all these characters and scenes are displaced by shadows that loom and slowly clear. In that improbable, fantastic place I shall be planted somewhere
with trees and natural stones,
turned slowly round
in the hollow of obedient earth.

And you, awake in the world,
without a shadow and less
than human, your ghost children
driven before you
down the cobbled mazes
mouth open,
cropped hair in a fiery light,
and your finally stricken heart,
wondering and amazed

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John Haines is co-author, with Harvery Klehr, of Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America (Yale University Press).

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