Of Terezín, of Spleen

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Of Terezín, of Spleen

This bird has two stones to kill:
This fortress wall and a hard heil smile.
Oh Terezín.
The crunch of gravel and this bird’s clamor
Are one in the same
In the No Man’s Land of Arbeit Macht Frei archways,
A cuff you’d equate to a kiss.

In this stark little hamlet of barbed-wire eyes
Refusing to lie prostrate for panzers after sixty-odd years,
How can you evade
The dementia of God, the fugue of David?
Its evidence reflecting back in rusted mirrors and porcelain sinks,
My quagmire mouth. It tattles on itself.
A million flickering yellow stars,
How I wonder where you are...
They say there was only one toilet here;
The smell’s gone. The typhoid—the winner!—took (almost) all.
The name you signed ending in “-berg” fades on yellowed paper.
Your ribs are showing. Your teeth are jewelry. Your limbs are kindling
For Saxon jawlines with ague eyes.

Herr Doktor, your leather-gloved hands choke a nation’s safe words.

I would’ve worn this Juden guilt like a stamp on my breast,
As my Baba almost did. But she evaded their Luftwaffe, crouching in
Yellow-red Macedonian fields, salvaging little pearls of onions
Under St. Nicholas’ censer, both pit and pendulum.
The tarnished horseshoe hangs downturned in our garage back home.
We are a family of Salomes, forever dancing too close to the edge
But kept alive, thanks to the silver spoons we’ve yet to gag on.
(Thank God. There isn’t Lebenstraum enough for quick-footed
Eastern Orthodox Salomes in the Master Race)—
Only room enough to cry at rivers later.

The cemetery smiles Auf Weidersehen,
Shattered stone teeth and red-rose gums.
The gravel mutes itself.
The bird has nothing left to say.

_Gloria Tannis-Coward_