

# Barcelona

*ALFRED KERN*

In a King Street cellar, Frances and I are listening to jazz.  
On the half-lit cyclorama, Toronto stands behind  
    Art Farmer;  
he blows flugel horn and a skinny white kid storms  
    the piano  
playing fast changes I cannot anticipate on  
    “Love For Sale.”  
For a year now, in cities where jazz amplifies,  
    I have listened  
to modulations—the music of changes, more moving  
    than melody—  
as I can with Frances, our soundings minor motifs  
    in major keys.  
His back turned, remote but insistent,  
    Art Farmer understates  
the chorus (those unplayed notes measuring  
    in my head) while  
the cool skinny white kid runs arrogantly against the theme.  
I grunt a player’s grunt, smile at Frances, raise my hand  
to touch her hand and see that she has been watching me;  
all those bars she has seen me hearing, looked as I listened.  
Her face (no trick of half-light) belongs to Aunt Georgiette—  
the same stare, the same frown, the same waiting patience;  
Still on the bridge, I can suddenly see it plain as Aunt  
Georgiette had always seen it. As Frances sees it now?

When I was ten, Aunt Georgiette decided I must be taken  
to New York City where “more people live  
    than people live

in your whole state'' and they roasted nuts and meats  
on the street  
where Aunt Georgiette bought a pretzel longer  
than my shoe  
and on the streets men were crying out  
what was happening;  
I ate the pretzel and begged Aunt Georgiette  
to buy the newspaper  
with a headline that filled a page: *Barcelona Has Fallen*.  
Because at home I had this book of maps (and other books)  
and when  
I was eight I found Barcelona and then found Barcelona  
again every  
day for weeks because I could and because I loved to say  
its name:  
Bahr-sell-ohn-uh. Barth-eel-on-ah. Barcel-own-uh.  
Bar-bar-sell-un-ah.  
From the roof of a building we saw two rivers and a harbor  
and bridges and steel ships and ships steaming and  
while Aunt  
Georgiette told me what I could see, I kept hearing  
the words:  
*Barcelona Has Fallen*, Bar-bar-sell-sell-own-ee-ah.  
At the theater, the stage was a city and people lived  
there too  
and music was playing and people sang in the street  
on the stage;  
Aunt Georgiette looked to see if I laughed when she laughed  
and if I frowned when she frowned and I had to try to watch  
Aunt Georgiette and also the people in the city on the stage  
to know when to laugh or frown but I couldn't watch  
the city

and hear the music with Aunt Georgiette watching  
me watch  
and besides she was very angry, and I was afraid  
that she knew  
all I was really hearing from the city on the stage was that  
Barcelona had fallen. In bed, lights out, the pillow over  
my head,  
I said the words over and over again: Bar-seel-on-ah,  
Bar-seel-on-ah.  
Aunt Georgiette has been dead for twenty years. She died  
ten years younger than I am now. Why have I  
just learned that?  
But she didn't look anything like Frances. A little  
maybe—around the eyes.

Frances and I take the cab to the hotel though we might  
easily have walked.  
Frances says she saw how I enjoyed Art Farmer and the  
skinny white kid;  
Ready for bed, she delays to watch the news  
in sign language.  
We make love and I hold her until she falls asleep and  
holding her  
I see Aunt Georgiette's face as I could not have seen it then.  
On my side of the bed, I know that Frances and I will  
never go  
to another city together and—forty years later, finally—I  
know that  
Barcelona has fallen. Barcelona, a real city, my city,  
has fallen.  
Lights out, the pillow over my head, I say the words  
in darkness:  
Barcelona has fallen. Barcelona. Barcelona. Barcelona.