

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Christmas Decorations

A. F. Moritz

The frozen city burns mildly
and the fires barely touch the soft gray cold.
A slight, veiled fire in a window where a woman
might once have been undressing. Small hard fires
fastened in place of birds to naked twigs.

In a cellar under black pines, a mother holds her breath
to suppress a cough: a child is sleeping against her.
A very aged mother, awake all night wondering:
What will it be like when I'm not here to see?
Will the ice be more ice, the night more night,
the city farther, our life more misshapen and quiet?
For tenderness, for fear of disturbing anyone,
she keeps her cough, age, wonder to herself.

That child died long ago. An old man
with ice in his hair watches a city bus go by,
at 2 a.m. through falling snow, lighted and almost empty
up a long arterial street. How warm it is in the bus,
when you have the fare – the kindly silent driver,
a rhythm and swaying almost like sleep,
dark houses and storefronts pass, a dream,
as though the route and the night go on forever.

So what if you've stood where a door was being closed,
stood in the cold dark, cursing?
Be quiet, pick up and go.
The low clouds, the snow, are the color of fine ash,
reflecting the blazing city, and the bus is gone.
Know what you have. And bless all travelers.

A. F. MORITZ is author of more than fifteen books of poems, including *Night Street Repairs* and *New Measures*, and biographies of Stephen Leacock and Emma Goldman, co-written with Theresa Moritz. He has received the Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His poems have appeared in multiple editions of the *Best American Poetry* anthology series.

