

DOROTHY BARRESI

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*The Last Poem*

I

Let last words be  
what last words are,  
a string of perils

in a tabernacle of human clay.  
Selfish, sexual, galling, moored, glorious:  
they are baptize, yes,

but capsize, too.  
Stutter and halt.

II

Take this helpful test at home.  
Is your tongue going slack  
in the trophy room of the mouth?

Are the old poems  
dissolving under heavy use?  
Are disappointments returning on ships

you once commissioned  
along the salt & silken  
trade routes of the heart,

and every hymn you've ever sung  
echoing back  
as though, just now, a great rat-maestro were conducting

his entire symphony of gnawing?  
Prepare yourself then.

### III

Take the garbage to the curb.  
Sort your laundry according to genus and species.  
See the cat but do not kick it.

In your rose bed  
a thing glows.  
It is the long-lost chip of a murdered president's

occipital bone and the perfect  
flint to start a fire.  
Warm yourself. The Surgeon General

and the mad scientist  
cannot save you now.  
Lost is lost when it comes to this.

And although the last poem reserves the right to speak  
when spoken to, in a language  
more dear than purple,

a French phrase comes to mind—*douce douleur*.  
We love our lives, and then

we are gone.  
The last poem is non-transferable.  
That much, at least, seems clear.