

# Legacy

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Every man is an omnibus in which his ancestors ride.

**Oliver Wendell Holmes**

For my children: Emily, Timothy and Gabrielle

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# Legacy

# Legacy of a Suicide

nothing can warm him now.

in that terrible garage  
he is standing sideways

topped statue    flat and fallen  
she found him swaying

above earth    already gone  
but she pawed him

down    clawed at him  
to breathe    to find again

the earth's faint beat and to start  
again    and still

though blue as Arctic ice    she  
beat his chest    to let her

in    to prise those rigid ribs  
apart    to let her have

his heart    to    thump  
but he lay there    gone

gone    before her morning tea  
and lunch    before the swing

to street    lurch of brake    lift of door  
and that first sight –    ghoulish

unnatural    and reeking of despair  
and guilt tumbled out of her

like a domino  
knocked against each one

arriving    each friend  
who rang    and one by one

the neighbours    wandering out  
stunned and disbelieving

as she knelt beside him  
fussing with the rug.

and everyone who goes to bed tonight  
will hold the other a little tighter

than they held them    yesterday.

2.

we have failed

mother spouse daughter friend  
neighbour shopkeeper passer-by

we sit in a row  
heads bowed and weep

thumb back through weeks  
to catch it

how did we miss the long internal  
howl

we have failed

this is neither true nor untrue

3.

from gentle rise  
to dark dip of swamp  
the street is silent.

no calls ring out their Angelus  
peel through noon  
for random walker

the neighbour about his garden  
that bell      its tenuous grip  
on all our ears

he on the front verge  
brash and loud as a crow  
directing a desperate theatre

waving the players in  
*come      come*  
*take your place in this*

and we did, the stranger with her dog  
the drawn-in neighbour  
as he collected his connections

out there by the road  
caught our woolly threads  
and pulled –

bound his nest with a magpie's  
mix, had us singing to him  
like birds      and he with us

parrots of the pavement  
laughter pooling under  
the rafters of the power lines

now a mist haunting  
the lonely swamp.  
the street is silent

he is gone from where he stood  
grandstanding on his kerb  
calling us in with yarns

ring ring at the Angelus  
*enjoy me hear me*  
*I won't be here long*

the bushes he pruned  
for pick-up rotting  
on the verge

the bottom layer  
crumbling back  
into the earth.

4.

it was winter when he left  
deserted the fostered streets  
took all his stories with him

now spring is edging its chin  
above his garage – a strange  
inappropriate warmth

we can see it from our veranda    his car  
still parked where he left it  
everything so still

even with spring settling on the bay  
the nodes in his garden    swelling  
without him

his grandchild    leaning into walking  
the dog still lapping the neighbourhood  
for his step.

the garage roof is slanted like a temple  
the door shutting out  
the horror – his morning execution.

everything is still so silent.  
the roof slanted    like a temple  
the door shut –

beside it    the hibiscus is flowering.

5.

late afternoon    and we congregate  
on his verge    his wife joins

us    pale and sheared    friends  
and family    retreating    back

to lives    while hers    shivers  
beside us    tiny pools

under her feet    everyone  
pretends    not to see

the ache of conversation    (heart-  
beat of his heart-beat)    everyone

pretends    not to hear.  
we are careful    not to tip her

over    she walks sideways    and we  
lean    camouflage her tilt

at the door    she lets her eyes  
open    shows me her muddy swamps

the leeches    and the horrors  
all her dead ends.

crossing the empty verge  
the late nasturtiums tremble in a rush of wind.

6.

spring  
and she is in her garden  
the secateurs leaning in

where he leaned  
she cuts wildly –  
him at her elbow

thumbs through retic  
fixes where he fixed  
follows his ghosted gait

talks to him all day  
weeds and pruning  
keeping the pool from turning

at night she lies  
on a tomb of mattress  
jumps into the hinterlands

of sleep  
where their adjoining  
chapters meet

in the morning  
sun on the blind  
she drops from world to world

his hands disappearing as her  
eyelids open  
bleary-eyed, reluctant -

the feel of his fingers on her waist  
there, and not there, keep  
her on her feet, while the house

rattles, while her steps on stairs, echo  
while she sits alone at the kitchen  
table

he is at her back as she reads  
his shadow on every page she turns  
and every elbow bend

7.

his dog still hankers  
for men

wanders the quiet  
streets with his vacant  
eyes and burnished copper

coat, his hollow bark  
to nowhere  
seeks out trousered

legs to loop a-  
round, follows them into  
depths of garage, curls in

pools of sun by doors  
his tail on concrete  
limp as a broken bird.

she calls him and he  
pads beside her  
too well-behaved.

he is hankering for a  
smell they both know  
she doesn't have.

8.

in the sun    her hair  
is a wiry halo    grey  
spirals and auburn threads

her thin arms orchestrate  
the late summer air  
cockatoos weaving chorus.

her feet are on the earth.  
her eyes far off saucers  
return and return

tell us about the ants  
marching in her kitchen  
the dropping of figs

the small seed growing  
in her daughter's deepest  
centre

winter -  
and there will be  
a delivery.