

The Woman Downstairs

The Handsome Family

Chicago is where the woman downstairs
Starved herself to death last summer
Her boyfriend Ted ate hot dogs and wept
With the gray rats out on the fire escape

In a thrift store chair I drank cases of beer
And dreamed of laying down on the L tracks
The trains roared by under smoke-gray skies
Lake Michigan rose and fell like a bird

And when the wind screamed up Ashland Avenue
The corner bars were full by noon
And the old stew bums sliding down their stools
Ate boiled eggs and fed beer to the dogs

The woman downstairs lost all her hair
And wore a beret in the laundry room
I borrowed her soap and bought her a Coke
But she left it on a dryer

She died in June weighing eighty two
Her boyfriend went back to New York
The cops wandered through her dusty rooms
One of them stole her TV

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