

Photographs of Jews

Yad Vashem, Jerusalem

1) An orphan child
crawls in the ghetto
like a dog.

2) A woman, wild-eyed as a deer,
stares at the muzzle of a camera.

3) A father points up to the sky
to ensure his son sees this
and not the brink of a muddy pit
where corpses lie in a casual heap.
The guards have raised their guns.
Birds wheel above, unimpeded.

I have dreamt of rough serge coats,
of escaping camps
and being sent to them,
of hiding in groves of trees.

I am a Dachau Jew with a yellow star
staring down the barrel of that camera.
I am digging potatoes from the snow.
I am hiding with my baby birds,
who will not keep quiet.

I shall not tell my daughter yet,
put off the moment, can't speak of it
in the trail of her bright innocence.

Some say God no more abandoned them
than the wind abandons a swallow's wing;
that the answer is as close to the question
as breath.

Can you not feel the ethereal dead
tearing at the veil till it's almost rent?

And what if I told you all those bones and teeth
hold for me a terrible beauty?

LISA JACOBSON