

George Szirtes
from Postcards

POSTCARD : TOWER

1. Tower

Once I lived in a country of small disasters.
In cities of perpetual mourning, rain
fell black as creosote leaving a stain
we couldn't remove. Streets with whole clusters
of houses vanished. Towers, commercial signs,
doorways, post-boxes, churches, bungalows
barrelled in darkness; long, stabbing rows
of terrible showers. Even railway lines
were gone. I had been here before and lost
my bearings. Now they were lost again. Each small
disaster was a form of tenderness that cost
a life. It was tenderness that was falling through
the space between us. It was what we knew
that kept us here, that kept us alive at all.

2. Reverse Side

What keeps us here, keeps us alive at all,
is tenderness of sorts, tight stabbing pains
we give familiar names to, that form chains
of association and enable us to call
out names: Desire, Anxiety, Distress
and Resignation... Names obliterate
whole streets. Someone arrives late
for a lost appointment. Someone makes a mess
looking for something. Someone's car arrives
at a locked door. All this is tenderness.
The rain comes down and nothing much survives.
You watch how people thread their way through acts
of being, through rooms and dreams and facts,
to arrive in dreams at this precise address.