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“At Freud’s House”

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At Freud's House

ENID SHOMER

In this city of statues, only a plaque
marks the spot: 19 Berggasse,
Sigmund Freud House. The famous
couch isn't here, but the waiting
room furniture—womb-red plush sofa and chairs
sent by Anna thirty-five years later—
is authentic. And the bookcases, still groaning
under the weight of so much thought.

Imagine that June night after the Anschluss
when he finally agreed to leave Vienna,
a place, he said, where he'd never
encountered a single original
idea. He arranges a few antiquities
in the indifferent moonlight of the sill,
the best of the little gods
and goddesses already crated, saved

this time not for the grave,
but his new life in London. For months
the cancer has made it difficult to speak.
He's learned to use gesture instead,
a particular bent of his head says *go on, I'm
listening*. All his life he untangled threads,
coaxed the story from the story
secreted around it, like a shell,

until he found the animal inside,
a soft legless thing that could not distinguish
punishment from praise and could not escape
its nacreous walls that shimmered like dreams.
He loved some of his patients—*loved*
was the word he used—invited them
to family dinners, lent money to a few. Why
should he have

refused? Even Moses was human. How else
could he lead a people out of a great injustice
into a greater wilderness?
Now late sunlight dapples the page left on his desk
to lend an air of immediacy.
Downtown, the bronze waltz kings tip
their hats, tip their hats
as if their music were still the rage.