

## Tennessee Williams Lying In State

I'm not sure why I came here in the fragile  
frozen rain - a notice in the news  
drew me along. The subway was a blur  
of streetcars passing deep below  
the footpaths of the living.

Up the steps and past the morbid usher  
in my funeral suit I found you resting  
warmed by café lights - a bordeaux rug  
held back the dark mahogany. No audience  
just bouquets of cloying

lilies and chrysanthemums that pushed  
remorse into the chamber's dimlit corners.  
Half expecting unicorns and regrets  
etched in glass, through gobs of makeup you whispered:  
first the dress rehearsal.

On your crisscrossed hands a Russian icon  
beamed peasant scenes out of that heavy box  
like Achilles' polished shield. The setting's  
interrupted rural rhythms faded  
into foothills - helium

angels strummed their balalaikas - Jesus  
at the center, costumed in a shepherd's  
turquoise frock, read lines from the Cyrillic  
scriptures to the vacant balconies.  
Were the critics here today?

I had thought to make an offering in ink  
but the perfumed air that furled upon your lips  
in search of windows swept me offstage, speechless  
down the stairs into the shattered rain  
towards the underground and back downtown.

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*Tennessee Williams died suddenly on Friday, February 25, 1983, as a production of his play The Glass Menagerie was underway at the Eugene O'Neill Theater. On Monday the Times reported that the funeral parlor had opened his casket for public viewing. A friend of the playwright's had placed a Russian Orthodox icon on his hands.*