

It Isn't Me

By James Lasdun


It isn't me, he'd say,
stepping out of a landscape
that offered, he'd thought, the backdrop
to a plausible existence
until he entered it; *it's just not me*,
he'd murmur, walking away.

It's not quite me, he'd explain,
apologetic but firm,
leaving some job they'd found him.
They found him others: he'd go,
smiling his smile, putting
his best foot forward, till again

he'd find himself reluctantly concluding
that this, too, wasn't him.
He wanted to get married, make a home,
unfold a life among his neighbors' lives,
branching and blossoming like a tree,
but when it came to it, *it isn't me*

was all he seemed to learn
from all his diligent forays outward.
And why it should be so hard
for someone not so different from themselves,
to find what they'd found, barely even seeking;
what gift he'd not been given, what forlorn

charm of his they'd had the luck to lack,
puzzled them—though not unduly:
they lived inside their lives so fully
they couldn't, in the end, believe in him,
except as some half-legendary figure
destined, or doomed, to carry on his back



the weight of their own all-but-weightless, stray
doubts and discomforts. Only sometimes,
alone in offices or living rooms,
they'd hear that phrase again: *it isn't me*,
and wonder, briefly, what they were, and where,
and feel the strangeness of being there.

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