

# The Faithful

By Jane Cooper

Once you said joking slyly, *If I'm killed*  
I'll come to haunt your solemn bed,

I'll stand and glower at the head

*And see if my place is empty still, or filled.*

What was it woke me in the early darkness  
Before the first bird's twittering?  
—A shape dissolving and flittering  
Unsteady as a flame in a drafty house.

It seemed a concentration of the dark burning  
By the bedpost at my right hand  
While to my left that no man's land  
Of sheet stretched palely as a false morning....

All day I have been sick and restless. This evening  
Curtained, with all the lights on,  
I start up—only to sit down.  
Why should I grieve after ten years of grieving?

What if last night I was the one who lay dead  
While the dead burned beside me  
Trembling with passionate pity  
At my blameless life and shaking its flamelike head?

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A longtime resident of New York City, Jane Cooper grew up in Jacksonville, Florida. She traveled through Europe during the summer of 1947, noting the aftereffects of World War II and keeping journals of her travels. Though she suffered from primary immune deficiency, Cooper maintained an active life as a writer and mentor. She taught creative writing for 37 years at Sarah Lawrence College in New York.

