



HE SAID FIGHT

*I talked to an old man.
His neck was wrinkled like a turkey's
His eyes were milky,
And his hand quivered
As he placed it on my shoulder.*

*Fight, he said.
Fight like hell.
Fight and think and work like hell.*

*He knew that pretty soon
He was going down
Into the ground.*

*He seemed to be begging me.
His hand caressed the muscle of my shoulder
Like he was trying to drag strength out of it,
Draw it into his own
Old bones
And feel the fire of life
Strong in his heart.*

*Fight, he said.
Fight like hell.*

*He didn't know exactly
What he was trying to tell me.
But I understood him perfectly well.*

*Fight, he said.
Fight 'em.
Keep on trying.
Keep on figuring.
And fight.*

He'd tried.

*Oh, Christ, how he had tried!
And he showed me his bruises,
Proudly,
But with a kind of desperation.*

*He was trying to transmit
Something to me.*

*He was ready for the grave.
But he had something in him
That he wanted to transmit to me.
Something he wanted to set afire
Inside me.*

*Something he wanted
To keep on going,
Keep on fighting—
Then he didn't mind dying.*

*He wanted me to say some word
That would reassure him—
Some guarantee—
Some promise—
That I wouldn't let go of this thing,
That I'd keep fighting.*

*All he could do
Was dig his fingers in my shoulder,
Shake his head from side to side,
And tell me to fight,
Like I was his only hope.*

*He liked me,
But he wasn't sure.
He liked me,
But he knew the temptations,
And he knew how tired a man can get.*

*Fight 'em, he said.
Fight the bastards.
And keep on fighting.*

*I know, dad, I said.
I'll fight 'em.
You don't have to worry.
I'll fight like hell.
But he wasn't convinced.*

*He was going down into the ground.
He was going to die,
And he wanted the fight finished.
And even when I promised him,
He wasn't satisfied.*

*He kept telling me over and over again:
Don't crawl in a hole.
Don't think you're smart.
Don't fall for the me and the mine.
Keep fighting, son.
Don't ever let up.
Just grit your teeth,
And do your bit,
And fight—fight—
Fight 'em like hell.
And I understood him
—Perfectly well.*