

Sharron HASS

Selections from *The Stranger* and *Every-day-Woman*

The Flutist

I'm embarrassed to say it -
if you don't call I'll die. I'm
embarrassed to say what is both
true and untrue. That which doesn't move mountains.
I don't move myself anywhere. Some
fool sits down to play the flute
at the edge of the roof - I fall asleep.
You don't call. No one dies. Except for
Mr. Present

Translation by Tzipi Keller

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How Many Times Do We Want to Go Home

How many times during the voyage
do we want to go home?
Slowly the gates of night open
the gate of the sleeping animals that gallop in their dream
and the gate of the mirror where the eye sees the back
and the mouth turns to stone.

Slowly a ship goes out into the night
strewn with light and pearls through
our manifest lives of profit and loss it carries
some sad splendor of a promise impossible to keep.

Were we to gaze fearlessly at the radiant eye
were we to kiss without betraying the longing mouth
perhaps we could rest like a leaf in its green border.
Something mighty that has no place or time

has broken off from within us and hovers now
in a mirage of light that turns to pearl
and motion
everything we offered that was not taken
and what was offered that we flinched from touching
is held in the ship that glides

on the web where sky meets sea

How many times during the voyage do we want to go home!
To reinhabit the reflection we left in the armchair
to give it the pearl that turns into light
and the passion that neither seeks repose nor draws
from the black blood proofs of loneliness, but leaves it to flow
like the gold, that once gushed free of greed, in the rivers

Translation by Vivian Eden

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Transparency

For Mario Luzi

The old old poet climbs onto the stage
and the leopard's back tenses in the dark.
I, the listener, do not know
whether I shall hunt or be devoured - my eyes on the old
old man around whom time is drafting a circle
that even the yellow Muse with her ankle decked
in bells does not cross only stretches a finger
to draw back the heavy curtain covering half
his face. From behind, death (I think) transparently
approaches bearing on its back sheaves of gold -
to feed the old old poet cold
and shiny bread.

The leopard folds back his paws. His talons etch in my face
lines white with astonishment. The beast leaps
and throws off a burning star to quiver in my lap
death and the poet smile and the great beast
lets go, lets me alone.

In the dark I embrace myself among the animals
that were placed in the water and the grass before
they were given names.
The old old poet, death and the leopard take
the fire and vanish in the light.
How shall we stay alive? Behind the passion fear behind
the despair love -
for a white and throbbing moment I was the babe
of the elements. And I wept first

Translation by Vivian Eden

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The Third Person

The angel's laugh doesn't light his eyes
His body spreads its robes on the shores of night
A lit face menaces out of its depths.
Don't look, don't look, don't you know
God's kiss is like a knife?

See here: a third person sits between us.
We pour wine and he drinks
We make love and he remembers

Hass

4

We are puzzled and he solves the riddle
What have we seen in the mists of the mirror
that brought us together like two
Flames to burn the face that shakes with laughter?

Translated by Lisa Katz

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I Stand in the Circle and Look Around Me

Garlands of flowers lie on the bed,
a white and yellow profusion hides the sick woman's terror.

A total rejection of love, Ophelia,
pairs even an orchid with a daisy
When desire collapses into despair
the body unbinds, open to interpretation.

Under the sheet's cold skin,
I understand perfectly.
Riches exposed through waste,
too hard to bear. Perhaps the flowers,
severed, would shut their mouth, cease their ceaseless will
to burn inside hermetic beauty
at the brink of death

When desire collapses into despair
I understand perfectly
a thousand tongues must be silenced
inside a body (mine?), that was yours - strange...
under my astonished gaze my clothes burn silently
inside the fire-blossoms
ruin mocks a brief and bitter beauty

When desire collapses into despair
I understand perfectly
and sink under the stream's cold skin
to pick yellow and white flowers
of oblivion

Translation by Lisa Katz

Mongoose

He

I want to sing for you. Not write. Sing. I want to come to your house and say, wait, one moment, before we start eating, before we throw everything at hand onto the coals: scraps of daily life, distant memories, the reputation of friends, underwear; before we fan the fire, before we put our feet up, before I get to know you, I want to sing you a song. A troubadour song. A song older than Shakespeare. A song in which I say to you, Oh, you, cold and terrible one, I'm feverish. Oh, you sit, the earth's silent axis, I'm restlessness and highways, you the pride and appearance of plenty and I the nagging one, the lowly one, pretending nothingness. But it's a song more ancient than yes or no, will she or won't she, a song before the birth of Shakespeare. It's a song in which I stand opposite you blue and sweet with longing and I see how your face tears itself from mine when the black mongoose face rustles at the window. The black mongoose face bares itself and the moon is plucked from the Pitango bushes. Your face that looks at mine intently turns suddenly to the mongoose, pointlessly. Your soul swells up when an animal stands on the threshold. A pointless animal. That you will never possess. That will never love us. Your face that looked at me smilingly, sweetly, darkens. Encounters an animal whose impenetrable nature, indifferent to your life, fills you with boundless riches. The animal that lost its way shakes with fear, thin as a black leaf. Your red heart fills at the sight, and bows.

She

A mongoose face shone in the dark. A fold gathered in my dress. When the head peeked through the window, the sky drew near and earth receded. Someone is coming. Some vagabond walks now in the gray palaces swelling in the sky, and you, my mongoose, his silent music box. My face fills with moons when I put my head out of the window. I grow taller in the cold, dark air. There the heavenly wanderer holds out an empty hand, easily passing by the palace gardens (and there isn't a room too spacious for his comfort), and makes the dark, taut face of the animal speak-- a lone, anxious messenger at the edge of the slope - and I, hearing you call me, turn around, returning like a giant moth to the heat of the room and the burning pine wood, carrying with me now, absently, what is nameless and homeless by choice.

Translated by Lisa Katz

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The Day of Blood*For Hilmy Shushab**

1.

We wanted to drop our hearts
off the porch; we knew the hearts of the old people
would reach the ground first, then the middle-aged ones,
and the children's last. But the bad man's smile
stretched out above us
and in his presence
we didn't dare compete with suffering.
We closed the shutters. All night we heard him laughing
outside the house, slowly, patiently,
one struck hard on the mouth by the angels**
until his body forgot how to store its humanity,
and eluded the growing weight of pain.
We didn't dare step outside. We pretended we forgot
where we put our hearts,
red, humiliated, unable to cover their nakedness.

2.

I hardly know your name, but
I have seen a green flower in frost
cover your face with victory.
Before life caught up with you
the bad man was there, the one with no need
for animals, for he has the neighbor's children.

3.

Night begins to stride, I follow
silently. When he bends
over the child's mouth, the hart's ears freeze.
My fear and the most anxious of animals

Hear nothing. The child refuses to say
to whom he belongs. Only night waits
to strike.

4.

A child stands at the doorway. No. Not exactly
the doorway. A child frozen
on the verge of consciousness, the arm of a chair,
the eye of a needle. I see, not with my eyes, but
with the fourth, the fifth eye
the lidless one, thrust in the back,
seeing those who stand and do not cross the threshold.

You don't want to leave and I don't want you to go.
Through me you see a tree hung in the window
and the sun leap onto the blue backs of the birds
through me you see
a dead little girl
appearing suddenly in the public park,
her mouth torn out and thrown into a hedge
and night, still half-hidden in the earth,
gripping her naked body,
climbing on her ankles, leaving red
stripes on her stomach.

I was smuggled away like a precious doll wrapped in rags
from the land of one God to the land of idols,
a large and beautiful silence gallop alongside me –

it took you on its back
when you were flung aside, nauseous, like a bitter green fruit,
to ride far away from the day of blood.

You are moving toward me now, your arms blue with the effort

to grab my hair --- look I am turning
toward you and all my years rebel, look a naked girl rises
from the hedges, look I present you with the body I didn't know
was mine, with which I could not stop,
then as now,
the death of another, which is also mine.

* In 1997, Shusha, an 11-year-old Palestinian boy, was clubbed to death with a rifle by Nachum Korman, an Israeli settler. Korman served eight months in jail on a charge of manslaughter.

** According to Kabbalah, at birth, a blow on the upper lip obliterates the memory of previous lives.

Translated from the Hebrew by Lisa Katz

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The Danaides

The daughters of Danaeus
kneel in Hell,
sieves in their hands.
In the dark
the Styx is invisible
but the slick mud
and the air
churning like knives
show them where to cast their hands
and dip the sieves in the water,
light as always
colder than ever.
Empty.
Over and over
empty.
The daughters become numb.
Like the mud.
Like the water.
But Hades knows his craft

and keeps them as beautiful
as on their wedding day:
gracefully lifting wine jugs,
placing dolls before Artemis,
offering their hair
like cascades of green leaves
in the wind.
In exchange for their virginity
and the dance of the bears,
they receive
loom, sieve, and scarf.
And Hades makes sure
that they fill the empty water jugs
with a sieve
with the same energy
that cut the throats
of the bridegrooms.

The fifty daughters of Danaeus were forced to marry the fifty sons of Aegyptus as part of a peace treaty between the fathers; then Danaeus ordered the women to kill their bridegrooms on the wedding night.

Translated from the Hebrew by Lisa Katz

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Selections from *The Mountain Mother Is Gone* (1997)

Most of the poems in the Hebrew original don't have titles. The numbers indicate the poems' place in the book. All translations are by Amalia Ziv unless noted otherwise.

1. Prologue

You, the stranger, whose face is dimmed by intimacy
spread your body into a net
to hunt me down beneath you, have me dive like a grey animal
to find the passage through which you came to me
before love
flooded the native-heaths
with forgetfulness

"I must know who you are, fish-girl" - signal your lips
half turned into frozen corals -
"For if you do not part from me
the girl will be lost in the belly of the fish"

3.

On the slow side of my face sits
a girl in a deep chair, guests
stroking her glittering hair
and time is counted by the marks of her
growth

5.

Against the guests' arms drawn out like crocodiles
to snatch
at the girl swinging like a bead

her orifices seal
into stone eyelids

6.

Far from the guests' mind scattered
in the garden like half-bitten raisins,
Inanna, queen of heaven and earth,
leans against the *buluppu* tree, and laughingly greets
the magnificent slit opening between her legs

Her body is a just beginning
wonder

7.

We ran for our lives from the circle
of the old
to the thin strip of forest burning
with life
Blue stars fell in the grass
and the high birds, silent between us
for so many years,
gave height to the sky, a beauty short-lived
and bitter, cold as knives, clung to my jumbled memory,
threatened with its fragility,
and forbade me to drink from you
in a ghostly thirst

9. The Border of Light

Unnoticed, the boat had slipped away from the shore,
pale mountain goddesses stole away
in the low fields, blowing down the orange blossom
or twisting the trail of the silver martens

Joyous in our compact bodily bulb
we carried ourselves off as spoils
scattering love like tyrants, our strength
unbearable.

In the tall grass the goddesses lay in wait
to grasp our heel as we ran in the wild
roaring to the wind
"more, do us
more"

Desire had neither face nor cipher
blind to the boat that had been untied
and time hung by our hem, light
as a yellow fringe of pollen,
indelible

"More" we shouted sliding to the
heron-fluttering water

when the hand of measure, lean and dark, cut at the foot
And pain threw back
our heads and
slashed

14.

-Oh Yellow Muse, what means the plural form,
the plural form in the poem?

- It is the small body that splits
in its loneliness into a host.

22. Writing

Not order but necessity imparts
motion all along
the breath drawn
from my icy depths

to the coals of the mouth
like a blind space voyage
determined
to encircle
a scattering of stars into the Big Bear,
Amen.

23.

I prefer to stay and sing
though once a day I lick
the comet splinters under my tongue
and still it is ashen.

24. The mountain mother is gone

The mountain mother is gone. One night
she went running down the road and left us
closed
in white crystal eggs
on the lowest sun terrace.

Time rocked us in whirlpools of
leaves and roaring wild beasts until darkness
burst in through the crevices, and we smelt the blood

giddy with loneliness and hunger
we sat down to play with silent flowers, our backs
to the sun-dial. The mountain mother has locked us
in anticipation. Sometimes the shadow of a passing bird
goes by and with it
a thought "did she have eyes?"

Our faces are close to themselves in the grass
clear, sorrowful
and clean of remembrance

25. Morning Song

In the day I survive better
 a tree divinity that drinks shallow
 water
 in soft deeps
 the sun harvests easy beauty, like gold worms
 from white stones.
 Even at night I do not awake.
 My face sleeping under a sea of black drift leaves.
 Drowned,
 I shepherd the saints provoking in their innocence to be as one,
 they ascend to the glow-worm, to the candles and lamps - to that which
 takes after fire.
 Their slow and sour smoldering like brown moths
 does not traverse the sea covering my face.
 No one wakes me up
 in the busy world, moving from east to west like a genetic flaw,
 I am the dream that blossoms purple at the end of a branch

Puff

the toll of the mortar bell
 leaves in its wake
 the febrile aridity of the absolute

26. Even in ignorance

Even in ignorance we knew
 that the fields are sacred. A place of
 undisturbed growth. At their border we left
 the iron hooves and embarked on the green road
 the road to the body infused with sky and danger.
 At the body's axis swayed a tree
 and in the hair's darkness blossomed nests of stars
 but desire already was
 a missing Cyclops' eye, mocking

Drawing near to the body
 as to the end of the birds' journey
 certainty is historical: genetic.
 The certainty of distances.

We did not know the body was but a threshold,
 a rock stopping a far and diving deep
 from which no echo returns

27. The eye lurks behind the door

The eye lurks behind the door,
 The motion startling in its abruptness
 traps the hunter in the yellow reaches.
 She awaits, the Presence
 in everything behind which-you-can't-see
 commanding me to grasp to my bosom some fire
 which fell from her, kindling the ice daffodils.
 A flimsy entity
 - a sandal
 around which history runs wild,
 - children turned away with not even a single stone
 in their pouch to throw
 at the deepening shadow behind the shoulder,
 at the slight trembling of the leaf. What sat there?
 Who strode into my strides? And until when will it force me
 to stand bare
 asking it to touch me, just once,
 even with eyes tied, but touch me
 so that I will not disappear of cold
 or error

28.

Those who did not have a mother
 know
 that childhood is eternal.

29. When the House Goes Empty

In the morning,
 the wheels of light fly down the slope, setting fire to the eye
 watching the borders of the house.
 The sharp leaves of the lemon tree tingle,
 and through the filtered milky light
 the silky shoulders of the horses tremble.
 In the delicate uncompromising distance
 between immense azure views heaped together at creation
 and a hand that remains empty
 a third presence arose, tall and strange, that commanded "be"
 and sent me away to the visions
 where the body stands under the globe
 filling with chests of wind
 cases upon cases of sprouting moons

He gathers them into gems, the blue ones calm him down

but the red prickle in his palm, hinting of something
he cannot recall. Something that was taken away
no longer to be retrieved

30.

In the plaster of the walls, between the tall,
face-scraped goddesses of the house
and the shadow of cloud-roses
(produced by a sudden awakening),
is inscribed the house's question
"who is the child here?"

31.

Beyond the words I inhale
the cooling abyss of desire.
How many miles shall I lap, how many horses
would forth
before I reach the chilling margins
the edge of the mother's body, the beloved' body,
the sated farewell
of sleep

32.

Am I leading or merely enjoying?

33. Memory

An afternoon sleep carries us
aboard the barge, children fleeing
from the giants of heat and boredom,
to a blue shore upon whose bank
walk the dead. Their faces creeping close like a cat
inquire what we have left behind
and whether we've already been betrayed.
Gagged with longing we grow bold
and attempt to grab their hand, have them lean into us
to see how high our love in the hollows of their vanished forms.
They slink away, sly as the shadow taken for water in the distance,
and blow into dust in the face of our wanting

A wave hurls us into waking, pale and poor
we know that someone has fed us from his palm,
not having seen his face, not having sated our hunger.

34.

And who are those following us?

35. The Smooth Boys

The smooth boys who would cross our lives
 with their song - had not yet been conceived.
 Earth had not unsheathed
 them like slender rain daffodils. All night
 we stood on the terrace observing the hill
 our faces agape as stone-lions' jaws
 to cheer at the instant transformation of matter,
 to deliver ourselves-_
 from time-ridden masters.

We fell asleep.
 In the midst of our assurance came the changes
 leaving no trace on the flag-stones which glowed
 with dew, robbing us
 of the endearments
 infusing us with monkeys' wild blood.

Blind and proud in the morning
 we tore out all the rain daffodils, a moment before
 the singing faces would burst forth within them.
 A moment before the wondrous stranger
 would change our lives.

Translated by Irit Sela

37. Lullaby

Among the honeysuckle darkness strips off
 its white veil and joins the apes
 (the only ones who night by night sleep entwined).
 In the turnings of the road it places scarecrows
 who wink their dead eyes at those who dare roam
 the black ground.

He who falls will never rise, he who falls will not leave
 will not find breaches in the dark
 warm mouths blowing from hot to cold oblivion
 he who is lost
 will not smoke in the morning at the foot of the hill

because he who becomes afraid, will be torn, shred
 by shred
 in a garden that cannot be stopped

55. With Yearning Eyes

With yearning eyes I approach
 a stream flowing between houses of old silver. A plowed field
 fends off loneliness - here in a blossoming abyss
 a poetess sleeps - and people's sorrow
 seems bearable or leaves me cold.
 He who is not of my tongue surely was born of whistling whales
 or black-eyed Australian birds - carrying within him
 the loot of pirates and pantries of love
 sweet as condensed milk -
 and yet, and yet
 before an empty gate a question always arises
 and in the peoples' eyes the disquiet, the terrible
 disquiet for an ancient monster is still tied at the gate of every city
 devouring girls and boys
 all through the spring all through the spring

58. Close-Up

I have to write of you, like a child
 that must give names to the darkness -
 to stop my shattering into loneliness
 my face composing what is hanging in the air.
 I have to say many azure words
 to free you from the stone
 in which we are confined.
 Even if the clouds are voiceless
 their weight draws me down to the grass, to the goldfish
 that grew pale in the sun,
 close to the face of an ant I see
 her, like us, caught up in a sort of feistiness
 gathering from hand
 to mouth.
 And the body is all caverns, deep sand castles
 that rose up, once, like a storm from the void, when you came
