

László GÉHER

Poems

The Star of Bethlehem

The year at Christmas, attention, please,
steps among the others, joins the fold,
with no warmth of the pen though, rather the growing cold,
like space among the stars. You too
have put your hand in my hand so many times
that it is so many hands – then we count.
But there's the rub, in place of numbers
there is but one. I do things one-handed,
if this is a poem, this too. In my dream
I had a daughter, I tried to set out, but she
called me back always. The stars have space
to turn – but at Bethlehem-time – untraceable.
My daughter warned me. Father, if you go
out to die, find something darker than my eyes,
for I may lose you in it. Then take
water and bread for resurrection. If I went
out to die. If I went out. If I had a daughter.

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I Only wake

A flower has no such, the way I dragged you
on the pavement, no such petal, the loose
skin of your neck a petal of blood, I dragged
you tenderly, so you don't get cut, your heels
ploughed a track in the mud, puddles soon
to quench the thirst of dogs, dragging
you through the court – they say
I only wake on a bad dream, my eyes get stuck
in the peel of waking like a foul fruit
stuck in time, I wake unpeeled,
it's summer, dogdays. I seek the way
to the tub. I'm glad you are not here
with me, then glad that you are not, I'm glad,
glad that you have never been, I say
by the time I get out to the tub.

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The Jungle

It was dark like the inside of a
piano, the twanging of the instrument
fills your eyes, I said you looked through
octaves, the sound is made in the closed
coffin, it comes to life in the depth
of the grave, I never said, please, look
somewhere else, the piano twanged,
swelling on me, the promise
dissolved my all. Now the dark –
if it's good to the wood, why not to me?
They say the sun, before stepping onto the sky,
dwells in the jungle, gathers darkness,
so I do from your eyes, for persistent burning.

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Absolution

The blooming doesn't last, on the icing damask
the beaked vase stands, the three flowers
I put there droop, as if the petals
withered out of a luke-warm handshake.
So we lived for three years. On the woolly carpet,
the downy surface of afternoons, we slid.
There were always china saucers with morsels of cakes
you mouthed, dropping from your fingers – on my pillow
(you slept on it) I always found dandruff.
Just tell me dear, I listen, pity is a mass of things.
Evenings the air, as if we drank the cherry-wine
from broken glasses, sweetened around you, your nose
exhaled a wind of perfume. I blew your mouth,
like blowing on hot soup, pooh-pooh, I spooned
its brown surface, the loving glaze, from your face,
but only your sin curdled, I took a sip,
it went down my throat. There was some waltz, forgetting-music,
your hands glided on ivory keys, I ought to
watch now. There is no bitterness in me,
only tonight the frieze of light on the cut glass,
as if carved by your eyes, strikes me as jarring, never
again shall I see you, but again I forgive.

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Winding Sheet

A wounded wing, it was your face,
 no longer looking, a dove before
 the accident, slipping off the sidewalk, creased
 like a dustrag. Look dear, I brought this
 to you. Some sentiment flutters
 against your mouth, like a web moving
 to breath. I never believed that one
 wasn't made to lie. Of course, I need your hand,
 a root, bulging the concrete, seeking soil,
 a pressing tendril around me – to unwind
 an afternoon won't be enough. Now fly
 my dear, fly, let me alone, I told you, let
 the wounded wing sweep, let me be touched
 on the mouth by a white farewell-bidding vine.
 I want my winding sheet, I told you,
 only after my death, please, understand,
 I care for no covering.

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„To execute my anger” (Isaiah, 13.3)

There is no word for anger. He was not angry.
 He put his anger in future conditional.
 Between two tree-trunks the remains of the heath,
 a tired green patch, a parched future, where no
 prophesy sounded over the place. A two inch
 desert the only thing, a fault of beard
 on the face of a prophet that clipped together
 the rim of his eyes so that he had to
 squint all the time. They say, the camels
 swallow the water as if they dropped tears
 inside, for need to drink. However, what gathers
 some rain, must bring forth a dry sea
 in the eye. Prevent the coming of the wind and
 the weariness over the draught. Don't rip my land,
 don't let he sky draw a furrow over the body.
 Don't let the passion sear to the root.
 Don't let me raise my anger.

Translated from the Hungarian by István Géber

Burger King

As if their heads were so many conkers,
 brown light-cracks muscling through their cells of pins,
 the men are eating.
 They are not thinking of women or of heaven,
 but banging open greased-up wrappers
 with mayo weeping through white napkins;
 they bite off more than they can chew
 while food-gauze comes like Velcro from its wounds.
 With mouthfuls barging round their mouths
 and pushing in along the tounge
 as if by being swallowed they'd be *born*,
 they are eating, all alone.

Translated by Anthony Dunn

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The Fishmonger

This then, is the age of the fishmonger, not the fisherman –
 his cap tipped as a sergeant's, unsteady on his quiffed head
 as he sizes up punters, measuring their movements.

He reaches for a carp as easily as you or I
 might dip our hand into a bucket of apples,
 feels for the fish, his ingrown nail smarting in the salty water,

and lifts it out, understanding as only he can,
 the foil disc of the silver eye, the wight of the blade,
 the engine-stroke of his heart, finely tuned to this cruel kindness.

Understanding as only he can, the spot between the knuckles
 where a nail might enter as if through butter,
 how to slice flash as others cut celery,

how to pare his speech as he might men
 were he hurt and pushed to fight.
 But like a tree hit by lightening, there is no healing bark

about his struck heart and the wood and the trunk's centre
 pulses and grasps for growth like a fish
 struggling for its last breath as if biting the air for water.

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For Psaltervoice

Hide me in the shadow of your wings,
 not to be seen in flight, when I
 would fly with you, not for the eyes
 is the wing, the eye breaks off the dove-
 feather on the up-stretched muscles.
 Dirty guano is all the flutter
 on the square where tyres drive away
 my jostling shame from the morsels,
 for so much I long for you, with a split head,
 with stupid dove-like motion, to be saved.
 A bird's wing smeared on stone, the flesh is a road
 to you, if it is, or isn't, at the end,
 and it has no voice, it flops, the carcass of a dove.

Translated by István Géber

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Mary

On his foot a fly alighted, inching along
 the wound. On top of his apple-shape
 bigtoe-nail it rubbed its forehands, as if
 mocking a prayer. After the drowning
 the body unbends, cracking, from the cramp,
 when the breath gets shortened and frozen, the time passed
 is a split of ice. How long we watch this? The soldiers
 look up from guffaw, they spy the relief
 of their headache, like the soothsayer
 sees the overcast sky, yet the word is born
 in me, my son, for I need no conscience,
 nothing conscious, for me you have taken
 nothing on you, immaculate and alone
 I stand. Just I. On the way home the dust
 in the sandals rubbes red the sole, just I
 think of myself always, not of you, even now,
 even the taste of vinegar in my mouth gets mixed

with other spices, for the bereavement, the decay
avoid me, they fear me like the living the carcass,
the sea the moon, I watch your erosion,
the void where your face was, like one
who can become a statue, but never a human.

Translated by István Géber
