

**Yael GLOBERMAN
POEMS**

THE DESK

Unlike Icarus, I am learning
to fly on my feet. Sometimes on all fours.
Still, the longing is one and the same:
to row with two revolving arms
closer to
a burning thing.

Five a.m., and the air is stormy.
Again, it is dangerous to wade into the day,
blue as it may be.
This island is made up of sharp fragments.
Things that were shipwrecked are building it,
but on it I can live.
I swim toward the jagged desk
grab hold and climb aboard.

Maybe this time I'll be able to leap up
without taking my feet off home,
off love. I call out to the tightrope walker
who walks the spine.

It isn't water that surrounds me,
your face surrounds me
on all sides.
At night everything spins back,
peers over-the-shoulder –

If I can't change the truth
I will change the distance to it.

Translated from the Hebrew by Vivian Eden

SECOND GENERATION**I**

The man who almost wasn't sits down at the table.
The woman who barely made it serves him plum cake.
This is my home: It is good here. Safe.
Mother leans on Father. Father leans on a shadow.
At night they tiptoe into my room in beekeepers' suits,
rub my temples with wax.
We are a very warm family.
The floor burns under our feet.

We believe in walls. Believe less in a roof.
It has to be built every morning anew. We build.
There is ammunition in the medicine cabinet
and a bribe in the bank for the guard
who lets us steal across the border every night.
Silence is the pitch that stops up gaps, seals the floors.
I hear something deep roaring and surging:
There's a sea underneath the foundations of home.

II

This house is filled with love. Father is strong
And mother good-looking.
Gershwin could have written our lullaby.
What good will this sorrow do
Where will I lead this sorrow
Where will I sit it down when it gets here
What will I give it to eat

Translated from the Hebrew by Vivian Eden

* *SECOND GENERATION* – a term used for children of Holocaust survivors

Witches (A Lullaby)

A hungry woman is a frightening thing.
She feeds no one, she is looking for something to eat.
She seems to be hunting. Every morsel unshared
Looks enormous, bloody. It is her hunger,
Peering like Cyclops's eye
Smack in the center of her breast. Watch her drag home
A live lobster, a purse full of coins,
A daffodil bulb,
rolled up map of Europe,
That apple, to pierce with a knife.

An empty handed woman is a threatening thing.
If there is no hand in her hand
Wind gushes out of her as if from a ravine
A strange, hot weather menace, the bad breath of a dragon.
She is a house in the desert with its doors ripped off the hinges,
Sand drifts freely through the rooms, piles up on the kitchen counter,
On the floors, turns the bed into a dune.

A woman alone scatters throughout her house empty cups
And cigarette butts, imprinted with lipstick marks.
There will always be those who will see
In the red arc etched with the seal of her lips
Duplicated ten times over, evidence
Of secret neglect, the exposed edges of a great need.
Beware little girls, sitting among dolls
As if among open beaks, handing out the tea:
Don't become like her.

Translated from the Hebrew by Jack Adalist

Ann At Thirty

You are surrounded by clever women
Who hold the doll to their ear
And nurse a baby. They too write poems,
But with one hand. You, on the other hand:
A door in darkness. Behind it
Darkness. Inside
You sit in a paper armchair.
A moat of black water surrounds the house
Chiseled in hard silence.
A narrow hallway leads to the room where sleeping is done.
The bed is a stump, trunk of severed tree.
On the refrigerator - a note: Call Ana.
Need to buy apples.
Do not show the gallows to the guests.
Something weighs heavy on the stone table.
Something untangles the fingers, unties them from the hand.
You pass through the rooms, checking escape routes
Like a fireman: grapes in the fridge,
Push buttons on the telephone,
The dog's pupils,
Little scaffolds in the medicine cabinet.
Electricity flows through walls. Blood flows through wrists.

You get up. With a fluttering hand you erect in the air
A spider-web shelf, for holding
The books you will write.

Translated by Jack Adalist

SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE

Someone is telling lies, outside
and then inside again, in an apartment
to which the heart pans like a camera
in a documentary film on marriage
I've been working on for years.
Someone stands straight, in front of the mirror
and talks to half the face of a woman
as though to the moon.

She is leaning on the wall behind his back.
The shadow he casts cuts her in two
and the words plummet onto the rug soft and reversed,
glowing like something unused preserved in the dark,
bits of lining he unravels from an old coat
they both used to love:

He sees how she leans over, flicks on
the nightlight, smooths the cover
on the bed he is leaving. But she sees
his face in the mirror
covered with her fingerprints.

Translated by Vivian Eden

THE WOMAN WHO DOVE TO THE SIRENS

What lured her was that voice, high and piercing,
The voice pitched for only dogs and men to hear,
From eardrums to the loins and then
Sprayed! Up to the dazzled brain.
What lured her was that voice, legless,
That swelled on the water promising a dark sweetness
Like crawling through the tunnel
opening to a sugar igloo.
What lured her was the longing that she was born
And probably would die with, the possibility
To take off to the deep, the chance
That a voice that high would take you that low.
For years men have been sending her
their salty presents, pure protein,
Their well constructed love, erected on citadels,
While she stood there as if in a circle, un-
touched, sending out good intentions,
Sending out strong passions
That just came back to her
Like the sound waves returning to a bat
Who has learned to see.
What lured her was that sealed legged voice,
A shuttering, sexless temptation
From which there's no return, its sex
The entire sea. What lured her was the chance
to suckle from that breast again at the age of thirty seven.
What lured her was her mother's voice.

Translated from the Hebrew by Karen Alkalay-Gut

The Boulevard

On King David Boulevard, old partisans
Are glued to the benches like bent candles,
Fading away in the arms of Philippino girls,
Telling them in Polish things
That they never told the kids.

In ten years the cable train will pass through here.
Iron rails will rest along the length of the avenue
Like a row of walkers fallen to the new grass.
I walk that broken line
Krakow-Tel Aviv-Manila.

Two blocks from here, my father
Is silent amid pictures of my mother.
His silence thickens like the glass of bottle
Corked by time. If it breaks, he breaks.

Something stronger than longing grabs me,
Conducts my feet to the wooden bench
As if toward a ferry:
An old man speaking, a beautiful woman folding a scarf.
I come and sit between them like a child.

He speaks. She looks at me.
I can hear his story. I can smell her hair.
Distances I once thought I would cross
Are now absolute: three strangers sit on a bench
As if in a station. The boulevard rushes past us
Leaving, as we do, without moving.

Translated by Karen Alkalay-Gut

The Poet

God's amazing success
When He made the Word into flesh!

And then this thing that you pursue:
To break that flesh
And all things past
Into flashes, short lines

To go back and bring forth
The word

Like a boy who dismantles the piano
So he can have a wooden stick
To bang on the fence with
And sing

Translated by Vivian Eden

AH

The body, so quickly
lost its memory.
If not now
then not at all.
Your hands passed over my body, molding it
to the shape of passion. Now
it is damp fog, darkness
in a cellar.
Memory fills with a face
like a hollow in the sand
very close to the water.
There, the sea.
Here, a hole dug with ten fingers.
This body is an echo in a place where then
our voices cried.
Let me go back to the deep room
where we found shelter once.

Translated by Jack Adalist

From the cycle

Everyone Must Overcome His Own Biography

I

Now, in this light, I can see:
two enormous parents inflating on the couch.
The crown is cast into a corner, nothing more than a toy.
Is it truth or a poem?
How memory extends beyond itself,
like the tree passes its own touch through leaves.
like the mouth that says
maybe this way I can get there.

II

The room is a large lampshade, softly lit
and at its heart you shine, the 1000 watt lightbulb of my childhood
Your glass skin, heating to the touch of my eyes
is a bell, and inside it my pen once again moves wildly
like that bell's tongue,
like the tongue of an ancient mourner,
like a firefly larva inside a pear

[...]

Translated by Karen Alkalay-Gut and Jack Adalist

AGAIN

Once again the earth asks
and the sky answers with a white lie.
A cloud, that beautiful broom,
far-fetched as a feather,
moves the questions from side to side,
making room for something you cannot find.
It's the lightweight things that send you flying,
those that used to move through the air.
All is forgiven, except a closed door.
Everything makes sense except for the slam
followed by nothing but total silence.
For days now, all the questions you ask
are fired in barrages, more to fend off
than to find out. Exhausted and stubborn, the mind
hoists sandbags, piles them up
along the walls, blocking every opening,
leaving open only firing slits.
But the sentry at the heart's gate
stupidly checks
only those who leave.

Translated by Vivian Eden

The beggar

At night he weaves his arms into a nest
And crawls inside it, eyes and forehead first,
Followed, then, by all the rest –
Neck, shoulders, begging bowl, the heart,
To the last organ

Huddling into an imaginary interior,
With the concentration of someone
Hiding in a bare place.

You see a wounded thing,
A man lying on his face,
But right now he is gathered
Into a single point of silence:

Building his house every evening,
He lives inside his hands,
Sleeps in his own arms.

Translated from the Hebrew by Tal Nitzan

FEEDING THE SNAKE

He is the large intestine, exposed to the sun,
of some fragmented deity
whose body was mutilated,
a section of the digestive system
of a primeval god
with massive appetites and burning loins
who was the prologue to the favorite son,
the one who resembled him most,
who rose to murder him:

A severed organ
that retained an amazing vitality
for its age; But with time,
the absolute distance from the heart
discarded on some Olympic drain,
some Vesuvius Extinctus,
takes its toll:
the chill damages him.

He is still capable, full of potential,
but the cold seeps through his veins
more and more slowly,
gradually freezing
the small, mean, desperate brain
that he has cunningly fashioned
from a chronic ulcer.

Translated by Karen Alkalay-Gut

NOW YOU KNOW

Now you know:
The body is one thing and love is another.
Behind, a man dies sitting upright
Enclosed in metal scaffolding.
You go out to the lighted street.

Insane, this innocence
Of life inside the body, counting on skin,
Stubbornly clinging to limbs
That just keep breaking down,
Rotting the way they will in the grave
Only more slowly

My love, the soul
Slows the process
No more
Than a refrigerator

Translated by Karen Alkalay-Gut

THE STARBUCKS DWARF

Her condensed body, full to bursting,
Was created by the shorthand of God:

All the details are there, complete.
But the grace of more than enough,
The wide generous strokes creating beauty
For beauty's sake, the expanses
With no real practical purpose, except that they transform
A place to a landscape, are lacking.

She sits, feeding herself conscientiously,
With a kind of patience: a hand
Raises a fork carrying lettuce to the mouth
And lingers. The little hand and the large face:
Little girl feeding her mother.

A child stares at her transfixed. For him
Even upright on two legs
She's a tortoise thrown onto her back.

His parents turn his eyes from her. Avert
Their bodies, their eyes. She has no hiding place
She is a one woman parade.

Translated by Karen Alkalay-Gut

AT HOME WITH THE WOMAN POET

To Anne Sexton, among others

In this crazy house, the children
Play on the carpet with honed pencils,
Lick sweet dynamite sticks,
Wait at the locked door behind which
She is cooking a poem

A dog called Machine
Chews on the collar bone of her missing husband,
Watches all entrances at once,
Stares hungrily at the rib she saved
To work on later, to make out of it
A help mate

Why doesn't she ever get to where she wants to go.
She walks to the window for comfort:
Look up at the sky, even God
Made rough drafts, this cloud, for instance
Is definitely unfinished

Two thousand twenty books on the shelves,
Six are hers. The walls are swollen with paper,
Any hunger could huff and puff
And blow them away

On the night table,
By her bed.
A goddess figurine kneels
At the foot of the telephone shrine

Come, sit by her on the gorgeous sofa.
She will leaf with you
Through her family album,
Full of frescoes.

Translated by Karen Alkalay-Gut

THE PROPER NAME FOR HORROR*“Fire, Brothers, Fire”**H.N. Bialik, “The Village is Burning”*

The girl thrown down on her back right now
Doesn't care if you call the thing
That is happening to her
Horror, holocaust, the end of the world or rape
Any more than she cares
What the name is of the soldier
Who is finishing her off like a leg of lamb.

The mud her shoulders are being buried in with rhythmic thrusts
Was once called land, was once called homeland.
The blank indifference stretched above her open eyes
Was once called sky, and rumor had it
There was a god up there.

Those who sit on the barbed wire fence of another horror
Reviewing names that might fit this thing
That is going on right now,
Stand right there in the circle of laughing soldiers,
Cataloging horrors.

Fire, strangers, fire. The girl is burning.
Even if she does get up, like my mother
She'll still be lying down for years.
In her well-lit kitchen she will hold out to her son
Arms covered with the scars
Of frying pans and suicide.

Translated by Karen Alkalay-Gut
