

Orit GIDALI Poems

Cranes

She is hiking with her husband in the Hula Reserve.
The children have run ahead.
She observes the cranes.
She says:
When I am a bird I will die in midflight.
He laughs in response.
She doesn't know that he has another woman
She thinks it is his way of saying—my dear, I'd recommend
not ever dying.

When it comes she won't die. Not at first.
The shame will drain her happiness, spasm after spasm, much like the gag reflex,
where did he bathe after the act, in which city did they meet, is he thinking of her,
she won't ask, but precisely because of that she will never be rewarded with an answer.
Sometimes she will cry.
Run kilometers, drink only juices, complicated things.
She will be so confused that she won't remember what she cannot.
The days will pass.
There's no use lying,
she will remain suspicious.
Cordial towards the future.

Her husband won't make an effort to bring her back,
perhaps because he is so panicked.
She will walk through the hallways
and watch him avoid her.
She'll dance her mouth around the silence.

When asked how she is she will say:
I am a happy person in a sad time.
Or:
What love has to teach me
she teaches without love.
She'll use these kinds of expressions.

One day without explaining she will get up and leave the house,
it will be urgent for her to see flocks of birds charging the wind.
She will cross half the reserve but she will find nothing.
There are no cranes, they tell her. There aren't any, and there won't be this year.
What do you mean, she'll become upset,

but it was a long way to get here,
there are no cranes, lady, what do you want,
but the journey and the traffic and the fatigue and the tension
years upon years,
call the person in charge
please call someone,
there are no cranes
just empty peat land,
her voice will choke
and she'll return to the car
instead of shouting
how could she burn the earth,
the dry and flammable earth,
but she's not ready to hurt anyone
she doesn't think she has the right,
in the end, as it happened, she died; she, which is to say, me; yes, slowly, but in the end, there's no
use lying.

Amazon Asks Me

Amazon asks me how I feel. I'm important to Amazon. Amazon wants to know me better, Amazon asks me whether I have experienced a loss of faith in a partner in the past year, loss of faith in a friend or an acquaintance also works for Amazon, Amazon only wants to help me, Amazon trusts me to tell, Amazon wants me to describe whether I've been experiencing difficulty breathing, weight gain, or recurring intrusive thoughts, Amazon shows me what other people in my situation did, Amazon knows I want to get better. Do I want clarity, improved mood, or help forgiving? Amazon loves me, Amazon is prepared to offer me more, a three-pack of natural capsules and a meditation CD for my car, Amazon asks for my phone number, Amazon wants to call me, Amazon asks for my address, Amazon wants to stop by, Amazon asks for my credit card number, Amazon believes in my ability to pay whatever I choose, Amazon suggests that I add an e-book at checkout, 236 thousand people have been victims of infidelity, and 342 of them have left a positive review. Amazon thinks deeply about what I've shared, Amazon doesn't deliver to Israel, Amazon suggests I enter a different delivery address, but I don't have one, I write to them, I don't I don't, and what am I supposed to do now without eucalyptus capsules and without being able to get up, and with dizzy spells and bad orientation, and a backache and neck ache and shoulder ache and hair loss and places that make me nervous and trigger me, and recurring intrusive thoughts, it's my fault, it's my fault, where did I go wrong, and with recurring intrusive thoughts.

BEGGAR

You promised me, you say. So I promised, I say.
And the words create a bowl,
and they knock against it like a beggar.

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WE COULD HAVE LIVED SO WELL, YOU SAY, AND GAZE AT HER, STILL PRETTY

In a little while Shabbat in the Sharon, and traffic lights take off their red, and the laces unravel and yield the bare foot, and the records of the word gather into a book and rest from their anxiousness to break, and the change in the wallet emphasizes the victory of the many and the small, and the expiration dates on the milk do not threaten to be expired, and the first fruits are relaxing in sealed bags, and the ice in the freezer assumes the shape of the most self -confident mold, and the Styrofoam separates into small balls that do not need the practical, and the central air does not apologize for deceiving the heat, and the screens do not apologize for deceiving the brightness, and the poetry switches off the linoleum floor and switches on the ceiling,

and the adolescents are softer and are not putting off thank you, and what is piling up is piling up, and what is split is split, and the clouds ponder the field, and the field ponders the fish that float among the bushes in their imagination, and in the vineyards, grapes turn into raisins, others into wine, and not all the sweet ones are contaminated with maggots of worry, and he who asks for a deluge does not intend annihilation, but only a hard, streaming rain, and the community leaders return from the road, gathering a family to themselves, and generosity is being seen as a quiet virtue and not for display, and mistakes are removed from the heart of things, and the body's exchanges are just, and the public domain is full of permissions, and the private domains are full, and the fruits have set a tenth aside and do not miss the missing part, but are lighter, sweetness is intensified, every branch that crossbreeds accedes to him with whom it was crossbred, and the bulbs open themselves to the

outside, and the bees imagine the honey, and the trees get themselves a new king according to the vigor of the blooming, and the asphalt conquers the earth and liberates the best of her on the side of the road, and Tamar and Amnon have moved into a pansy, where they are making cakes out of the colors, and the dust is withdrawing before the pollination, and every drizzle is the chance of a rainbow, and the green that is in the bushes almost overwhelms the leaves, and in the old people's lawn that surrounds you the water sprinklers of winter open, and, indeed, there is suddenly a good southern wind,

only that she doesn't answer when you ask, sparing you the nothingness, and her wrinkles multiply at once as if the little girl inside her were shrinking her into herself, and your words glide on the slope of her nose when you lean on your cane, looking at her, looking at the blossoming, looking at the asphalt (we could have lived so well, you say) remembering the earth

Child

You come out to the living room after bedtime
Bearing your simple question, like a passport.
It always begins with “What does it mean?”
and ends with “But that’s not an answer!”

I can barely answer any of them, Child:
not what orders the periodic table
nor what lies beyond space, if anything at all.
But standing before you, I suddenly feel
that I may not have that much left to learn after all,
and I might already be there.

And when you drag your feet back to bed
dwarfish in size, gigantic to my eyes
I know I can now remain silent in the years to come
just listening outside your door
while you read and fall asleep.

There is something beyond space, child,
I want you to know.
And it is for its sake I approach your bedside light
turning it off. On. Off again.
From within, the house winks at the stars.

HEIR TO THE CURFEW

1.

Your body spills onto the bed. Good days. And only your hair, which is growing longer, stops me from being happy. This week you learned to walk. Soon you will be able to climb Mount Moriah, your brother Ishmael at your side, and which of you will continue to the ascent, now that there is no one but you to offer a ram in your place. My son, how is it that I do not extricate you, that I let time pass, your hair lengthen, bound in my hand while you sleep. Blindly groping, you find the nipple, and I offer you milk, anoint you with obligatory libations.

2.

And what has possession to do with your hair, which will be cut, no more ponytails, no more hands caressing the ponytails, cut short, like the time from here to the army, and to the curled-up cord of the telephone, busy at all hours, which, like girl-curls, our hands caress.

3.

Do not drink, my heir to the curfew, from the waters of conflict, the waters of Meribah. They bloat my stomach, and that of another woman whose son was killed in the shelling. She asked them to save her son—her second son—who was injured, but the concrete, but the solidier
(camp refugees equal refugee camps, heaps of what we will become if we do not stand strong) but the flow of the blood that stopped only in her eyes, which slowly went cold with the boy.

4.

Do not take part, my heir to the curfew, in the shelling;
do not take your father's uniform still smelling of the
laundry, don't mistake them for things in which there is
no danger, soap-free detergent, intention-free violence.
Their smell was once the smell of an olive tree uprooted
to make room for the destruction, in which you will not
have a hand.

5.

Do not take part, my heir to the curfew, even in what
your mother says, for she hesitates and does not
breach the border of her house. The walls are blinders,
her hands are blinders on her eyes, closed this morning
behind the newspaper when she saw there what she
saw. Even in her, do not take part, leave her be in her
house, and leave her, for her wisdom has gone mad,
otherwise, how to explain
that she, occupied by your sweetness, is not rising up to
do anything.

I CALL TO TELL A FRIEND THAT MY MOTHER IS DYING

I moved apartments three times in three years—it still beats
buying, in my opinion. Who knows how long this country will
last.

The children, the work, there's never enough time, I just called
to hear your voice.

Awful things going on in the world.

How are you?

YEARNING CRUMBS

Return, return, I am waiting in the kitchen. How did you know to teach me that the flour is the Torah and the kneading calms the yeast like the flocks before the slaughter, that the general opens into the private with the password of the hands, and that in the vanilla there is no cheating.

When you were alive there were entire days I could not think about you and now there are entire days I can. Without admitting it, everyone with a mother is a suspect to me.

I don't defect to happiness, but I don't demonstrate longing in any empty square.

You collect the crumbs with a sweep of your hand, straightening your glasses by aligning the frames with the ears, not the lenses with the eyes, replying with the body that you already lost, and I almost forget what I held in my Adam's apple, clenched on the words that were once between us. And now look at us, chatting for hours. There is no rule about these things.

I read you the winners of the short story contest, even the jury comments. To the jury comments you would never in your life have listened, but I don't care, we are having a good time, the phone is on silent, and I am not subjected to the knowledge that you don't call.

I am telling you about my life the way I tell my friends, it's only that I happen to have more of it than you do. The little one has learned to read; the older one still

believes that the answer will be yes. And home is the place in which the sum total of actions outweighs the total sum of nonactions; every morning I wake up in it, scale-crazed, and sometimes I forget that you-and here you are shifting your gaze.

FROM SONGS TO A DEAD WOMAN

You

1.

When you rose up in the elevator, you were not holding her in
your arms.

When you stretched out in bed, you were not holding her in
your arms.

When you opened the window, you were not holding her in
your arms.

When you took the dizziness pills, you were not holding her in
your arms.

When you stood on the windowsill, you were not holding her in
your arms.

She lays in bed, your daughter. From time to time she cries out
in her sleep.

People gather, bobbing their heads around her blanket,
bobbing like all her childhood seesaws, gathering against her.
Move over, children; let her go first.

You rose through floor after floor, the
umbilical cord adrift behind you
like the ribbon of a gift that
will never be given.

Your Daughter

1.

Her black eyes remember how you went away and didn't come back
and you left only the color of the road in her pupils as a souvenir.

2.

Behold, who is this that cometh up from the kindergarten, laying down her drawings in which I am not
drawn.

She scatters the grains of rice on the plate to create a thin lace.

And she does not give a single word away.

May the air between us not be filled even for a moment.

From the window you can see the playground, which is painted in primary colors, colors
simple and pretty, so close to the house.

3.

Sometimes it seems as if closeness were possible, as between two consonants of a word
written with diacritical marks.

But only the frame catches the slamming door in its two hands.

The handle straightens like a blank line.

Your husband

1.

Two boxes in the bedroom.

Photos of the first wedding above photos of the second.

In one he bends toward me or toward you. His large hand is binding.

2.

The baby's first kick didn't excite him as a first kick. His eyes lit up and went dark like the blink of

a silent siren.

3.

Sometimes in the morning your name is spoken, rushing our speech so as not to tread on you by accident. Most of the time you are lying there, quiet, a room that hasn't been swept.

4.

Curse of Rachel and Leah burning in me, this curse of she who does not know which of them is she.

DID YOU PACK IT YOURSELF?

Of all the questions to ask:

Did you pack it yourself?

Yes, by myself.

It was hard, I said.

But it is harder to fear that it will never come.

I am not beautiful, you see,

And the heart is the size of a fist.

Translated from the Hebrew by Marcela Sulak

*The poem 'Amazon asks me' is translated from
the Hebrew by Yardenne Greenspan*

