

Tableau of Sought Time

A selection of poems by Lisa Grunberger

For Paroles des jours

An Ordinary Day in Camp for a Boy Named Aaron

“Everything that happened is imprinted within my body and not within my memory.”
-- Aaron Applefeld, *The Story of a Life*

Children learn from animals how to live.
The animals devour children in a cage.
A child observes a dog eat a child,
maybe his sister, or a stranger.
A girl stands on a box and sings
like a nightingale, a song in a language all her own.
No one understands.
But tears, like small animals,
devour the silence.
Even the eagle holds his breath.

After the Rain

The puddles in the lawn chairs reflect trees, lost leaves
like a man with a receding hairline. After the rain
the ache of fall settles in the air like spider webs atop the bushes
Worms invade my dried Turkish apricots and the chicken is under salted
After the rain I crave oatmeal walnut cookies and a glass of milk
I crave sex, hard and raw, to stop time yes, hard sex that stops time, some-
thing to chew on, like taffy, raw beef, seaweed mineral rich, after the rain
I run five miles leaping over puddles Kierkegaard-style
I listen to Coltrane and Neil Young, Elvis Costello and Janis Joplin
I break open the red when sufficient time has passed between
the fall of the sun and the rise of the moon
after the rain I want the carnival to come to town
to set up a tent between the church and the abortion clinic
and I want all the kids with A.D.D to throw away their drugs
and all the tired mothers to get drunk and I want to sway
my hips until the birds start singing their song and
I want to know a man who understands the Saturnian rings I make
the circular twists and turns of my body's often sloppy penmanship
I want him to know how I dot my i's and cross my t's
I want him to dot my i's and cross my t's
O Lord after the rain I'm so wet I don't know what to do
with the only body I've been given and given and given

Taking a Cat Nap in the Afternoon New Lovers Pass the Kitten Sleeping

*I had to stop here and there in order by resting to allow
my Jewishness to collect itself.*

-- Franz Kafka *Diaries*, November 1, 1911

The kitten pauses before her shadow,
paws it tenderly, then less tenderly,
until she begins to dance into and around
her shadow; it reaches out beyond her body.
She dips her nose into the pool of herself,
to sniff and to see at the same time;
it is impossible. She tries.

After some time
she settles into a sun crescent
by the oven
where the green towel hangs,
grazes her head like a canopy,
a *chuppah* of heat, the sky
pours in to meet her purr with light.

On the Bus

The stranger touched me
as though I were
a piece of sculpture
the bus a museum
the driver the guard.
The stranger was nine.

He chewed a strand
of black licorice
like a sailor,
touched my hip
as though he wanted
to dance.

He was alone
in the city
raining monkeys and stars.
He carried a bag of books.
Placed a book on my lap.
Piled them up.

Nabakov, Shakespeare,
Mad Magazine, Sylvia Plath.
Do you have children? he asked
tapping his finger against the glass --
a boy-man on a bus
at 8 a.m. heading to third grade.

The driver winked
at us,
opened the huge door
and he spilled out.
I felt my frame sweat,
longed for a cigarette.

Hard

Hard to leave Desnos in the April rain,
the red wine on your white T, last week's
blood-moon. So hard to speak when
blackbird roars and swallows his name.

Blackbird mark me soft, a street
with wet cement. Come read to me
about the sky in its thirteen parts.

Read to me, blackbird, about Icarus and Breughel,
while I hold his ears like wings in my new hands,
ocean hands, seaweed hands. It's so hard to
gather you into one body, one life.

So hard to know memory's finitude.

It's so hard to
find the hidden here
inside, so hard to swallow
blackbird when the sun rises.

Evening comes again. You
wrap the moon inside a rose.
We multiply into a thousand ladybugs,
hoarse with memory.

Joseph's Empty Pockets

The estranged traveler
lost all his words
through an unknown hole
in his old coat.

He goes to get his hair cut
near the train station.
Sits down in the worn chair
feels the lightness of his pockets,
thinks, as the stranger
(who smells of cigars and strong cheese)
scrubs his head,
the soap suds flying through the air
like hungry birds,
thinks – how will I pay for this –
for the banks are closed on Sundays –
but even tomorrow will not do
for I have no money in no bank.

Then his hands, Frick and Frack –
for he has named them in his travels,
they have proven to be good companions –
began to dance and make a flimsy bridge
in his smocked lap. Frick and Frack began
to scrub the air, began to emit sparks
of their own making.

This is the beginning
of how Joseph comes to have his
own popular chair in the Barber Shop
by the train station
where his long hair
was cut for the second time
in his already long life.

Rhythm Rests

The rhythm rests around their silhouettes.
Their steps so slow I cannot tell whether they go foreward or back.
The stick reaches for another point on the road.
A shadow of laughter, high-pitched and kind, comes from behind.
The children or the maple on fire, I wonder.

One is taller than the other. I imagine
a man and a woman out in Autumn,
caught in a whirlpool of walking.
A stick casts a shadow. It is a guide, a feeling,
a crutch. A dead stick of sugar cane.

Two dots in the distance, touch and talk.
A Japanese maple on fire.
A stick casts a shadow.
Three kids, rolled up jeans, their ankles tickled
by the grass, rake leaves.

I imagine their ankles swollen, sky-blue veins.
Two sticks cast a shadow.
The leaves around their feet dots.
A Japanese maple on fire.
The kids rake leaves in rhythm with the falling breeze.

A still silhouette in slow motion.
They are guide and compass, crutch and sight.
It is two men, old and older, son and father
or two brothers. I come upon them, a Japanese maple
on fire, woman, red, panting.

They are a feeling I run towards,
come upon quickly. In a heart-beat
the children's leaves are covered with snow.
In a shadow's breath, summer comes, a crutch of hot belief
on a sandy beach. A grainy feeling between the toes.
Queen and pope-like, each man raised a hand when I passed.

Touch and talk. Did they hear me come, my red-fire breath,
before they saw me pass? I wonder and will wonder, long,
so long, until the wonder passes, and they and me and it are gone.
We become what it is we pass until it is always.