

THREE POEMS

Rachel Hadas

THE BOOK OF LONGING

Pearls on the dream chain, what two friends and I
 have separately been inspired to write,
 molded from longing, from the privacy,
 the phantasmagoric realm of night,
 into the fake-transparent glare and glaze of day;
 out of the catacomb in which we live
 and tunnel through to ordinary paradise.

Which is the dream world? Work and motherhood
 and school and morning and the back and forth,
 the getting there and going home again,
 versus the violet dark
 in which one's free to swoon:
 this binary division is wrong
 and right. Night is the time

the phantom figures come
 to us still wet with *rivulets of dream*
 but waking in grey dawn
 to the economy of drab refusals,
 impossibilities. The bus to the suburbs
 was pointed in the right direction
 but would not, could not go all the way.

Be careful what you wish for, said the dream.
 And what—desire's other side—you fear.
 My fear was not so much that I would starve
 as that I would lose my appetite,
forgotten by the force that matches green
to trees that through the green fuse drives the flower
and where you live by force, J. added, in

emotion's underground. (The catacomb!
 I said so.) *I can bask*, A. hopefully
 said, *in the shadows*. Where, we said, we live.
 Be careful what you wish. The price is high
 when dreams come true. And the alternative?
 Halfway to its destination
 the bus turned back, and in late autumn gloom

I found myself inside Low Library again.
 Life like a dome of many-colored glass
 glinted, severe and cool, through December rain.

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Be careful, life said, putting pressure on.
Desire hardened to a mask like stone:
petrified yearning sticking out its tongue
defiantly, or toughened by despair.

*Aren't we all, asked A.,
the sea captain and his waiting wife?*
Pace on the roof. Walk in the catacomb.
Habit dulls the throb; the ache persists.
The doctor said "Be careful what you say."
*A lasso that never caught, said J.
And: you cannot afford rights to sunlight.*

*Something about being suspended nowhere
between life and death knowing too much,
I don't know, said A. And then the doctor:
scribbled "Be careful" on a prescription pad
and without looking handed it to me.
Since we speak of lassos, in this corral
of shared unspoken things that we all know,*

take it as read: be careful.
*I lost the thread, said J., and we both nodded.
Looked up too late and (was it night or day?)
love (call it Eros or catastrophe)
knocked me out. And A.:
I thought it was useful to know that life is short,
to know not to squander time, to say love when you felt it.*

We sprawled in bed all morning, curtains drawn,
*and let fly into space the infinite
oxymoronically shared loneliness
that dragged our hearts down, unstopped, like hair thrown from a tower
for a lover to climb, so many sad Rapunzels,
hair dangling from the tower of the forbidden
for a lover to climb; a life that was never caught*

*(old lines cut deep and bleed, I wrote),
that stretched so thin and taut that it became unusable.
How sad, asked A., is that? We slept and woke, each one
Into the private, universal theater of her body and her day.
Male verticality whisks off the mask.
Idyl? Mime? Comedy. Tragedy.
A lifetime has been leading up to this.*

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SONNETS IN SILENCE

i

Squinters from winter on parade
 stroll down springtime's promenade:
 a froth of blossoms, living lace,
 the annual bursting out again.
 Commit the pattern of the day
 to memory: shadows, sun on skin.

We are so blunt in our perception
 that it requires a demonstration
 of what we do not have to whet
 the blunted edge of appetite.
 I'm hungry? Glossy images
 of bread and cheese and fruit may make
 me even hungrier than I was.
 This is a fuller emptiness:

ii

I angered you by keeping you awake
 laughing and reminiscing with my sister
 at midnight on the phone
 about a funny man we both had known
 and she had even married long ago;
 still droller, dead, than almost anyone we knew.

Words enraged you. Did you want me to join you, then,
 in the colony of silence? Hill; slope; bank.
 Cloudbank. Or else deposit: put put put
 and never take. Or take and never spend.
 The balance was off. Something was awry.
 But in that bank of silence tellers' windows
 are openings: through the bars fly buzzing batches
 of similes. I wave and watch them go:

iii

Likenesses of a silence I refuse,
 living beside it, to live in or die in.
 Is death the final acquiescence, high
 dive into pure silence? Or an escape,
 as people are said sometimes to commit
 suicide propelled by the fear of death?
 Ghostly cohabitation. Is silence
 the province of the living or the dead?

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Questions only images can answer:

A little boat. A wall, no window. Rain.
Darkish smoke that drifting hugs the rooftops.
A border ornament or else whole cloth;
Figure or ground; the pattern or its absence.
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is.

iv

Its scaffolding dismantled,
the hoary castle reappears, gaunt, grey,
startling in its blank-eyed vacancy.
Moss on the pitted stone stripped off, gouged out,
the empty sockets glare.

Ghostly cohabitation:
this is how we live for the duration.
Everything looks more or less the same,
but the sky is a kind of screen,
your face is a kind of mask.
The heart keeps drumming, but
some crucial force drains out.
Words can't quite penetrate the murky air,
so usually I no longer ask.

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THE SLEEPY SOMNETS

Stances

We twist and turn in sleep. And in the least
angle of the body toward the waking
world also we strive to find a stance
poised sufficiently; an equilibrium.

The next task, then: to summon up a voice,
scarf to the dull opacity of thought;
to glimpse, however briefly, a bright fold
of is it silk, wound loosely round the throat?

And unwind this, undo, do up again,
button this button, draw the line at pain,
and (never losing balance) shift the weight
from one foot to another—all without
stoppage or seepage of the endless flow
I need to lift my body up to you.

In the Middle

Our daily waking from adjacent dreams
tries to repair the loss—
less each day's passing
than what is leached by sleep.

Since light can never be enough
we suck up darkness,
lie down, let slumber spread as far
as where day's travels halt.

What does love mean if not
a mortal combat at the wall of limit?

This is the way we've found:
in grey light before dawn
the warm entangled nest, the hooded eyes,
the lips that hold their secrets separate.

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Invisibilities

Dreams provide practice for the many shapes
of absence to which we're condemned to wake.
Either we need to excavate a space
after the fact inside our hearts, not knowing
how much room the newly dead demand,
or else the place is waiting like a tomb
crusted with ornament but untenanted
and ready for the fresh and precious dead.
A deep net flashes through impossibly
turbid trenches; comes up dripping, null.
Emptiness throbs inside the wasted room
or rises and stalks out over the sill.
Dream drill; the drift of the invisible;
the end of love will be what we become.

Rachel Hadas is the author of a dozen books of poetry, most recently *The Ache of Appetite* from Copper Beech Press. She is also the co-editor of the 2009 Norton anthology *The Greek Poets: Homer to the Present* and the author of the forthcoming *Strange Relation: A Memoir of Marriage, Dementia, and Poetry* and Paul Dry Books, among other prose works and anthologies. The Rutgers Board of Governors Professor of English at Rutgers University in Newark, Hadas is the recipient of the O.B. Hardison Jr. Poetry Prize from the Folger Shakespeare Library, a Guggenheim fellowship in poetry, an Ingram Merrill Foundation grant in poetry, an award in literature from the American Academy-Institute of Arts and Letters, and a fellowship from the New York Public Library Cullman Center for Scholars and Writers.