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Goodboy

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Anton Shammas · *Israel*

DEDICATORY ENTRY

My father died in the summer, and the barrier
Between us has been crumbling ever since.

Now, in the fall, he stands like a door
At the edge of the no-man's-land of my life—
The border before him.

This is what I tell the child
Trampled inside me,
This is what I tell the child
Standing before me.

My father stands like a door,
And of the three of us one goes in.

translated from the Hebrew by Judy Levy

GOODBOY

I
I am here according to the logic
of city and stones
And stones are my lips.
My hands are limp—
according to a logic of mine.
I hear the night she overlaid it.
Yes, I do hear the night,
and write drafts for the dead child.

II

By the window, across the yard,
a child is weeping in Jerusalem,
according to a Biblical logic,
Solomon-style.
God is holding the city by its wrinkled feet,
and, lifting them up, He whispers:
shall we divide?

III

A chill is raised like a sword.
I withdraw.
I saw the night sluggishly drawing near,
leaning on the walls,
collapsing in dark fear.
And, to tell the truth,
I am seeing the show, meanwhile, in awe.
Yes, I do see the show.

IV

Sitting, with my back to the table,
I gaze at the wall.
Or:
I issue a self-search warrant,
to break into my memory
(the past is a heinous crime).
I lie in small ambushes
for my love affairs.
I signal to myself, across the room, hissing,
with romantic red lights
(restrained, though),
For the redeeming bell I wait,
(didn't you know?)
and when the time comes—
if anybody will bother to ask—
it seems that I will be reported missing.

V

“One-way” is the rule of the game.
Amichai goes out of Hebrew poetry,
leaving a “back soon” sign behind.

I don't.

I send postcards in the morning
to my especially dear friends,
saying that I'm sending them
postcards in the morning.

VI

I sit and see, changing lenses
once a year, adding minus-one to each.
Meanwhile, by an abstruse logic,
the world is becoming blurred
before my very eyes.

A hidden hand plays with the focus.

I don't complain.

I do not whistle.

I don't roll empty bottles down the aisle.

But I'm far from being calm.

And, to tell the truth,

as promised above,

I worry for the safety of my limbs.

VII

And I say that it was all unnecessary.

For, in the end, the little things,

the long sentences

and the ceremonial gestures

all come to an end.

Then loneliness will break in gently,

through the wide-open door.

VIII

A feeble word is looking inside me
for the way out,
scratching like a cat
that is locked-up well.
A wail lands on my soft palate,
falling into an ambush.
And I don't dare.
I want the queer nothingness
lying between the clapper and the bell.

IX

I'm writing drafts for the dead child.
He's standing by the window, across the yard,
signalling with his tear-lantern.
He does see—according to his logic,
and according to mine.

translated by the author