

The Toolmaker

The toolmaker lavishes attention upon his tools.

So precise, so exact, he sings to them
lullabies and melodies, crooning hymns

and they sing back, a low, deep thrum.

Over the course of a lifetime he has sharpened his skills —
but humbly, always entertaining doubts,

as if he senses the latent discordant note,

the tool that will fail him and fail to respond,
no matter what he tries, no matter how he sings.

When this comes to pass he keeps the faith:

he knows what he knows and nothing else
and sings the symphony of his loss,

the crashing cymbals of his despair.
The tools answer him, their hairline cracks,

their broken, fissured voices.

Itzhak Perlman's Dance

Itzhak Perlman came to the stage in a wheelchair,
stood, gathered crutches, swung legs painfully up a step,
manoeuvred himself to his seat, adjusted his body

whilst the orchestra waited, the audience watched,
placed a white cloth over his shoulder,
retrieved violin and bow from the first violinist,

cradled violin under chin so it was extension of body,
extension of hands, then released note after exquisite note,
vibrato, sweet melody into the audience's hush,

the nimble, leaping flight his stricken legs
could never make, a theatre full of people turned voyeurs,
silently watching him dance and dance, like none of them

ever had, like none of them ever would,
not least the dead boy washed up on a Turkish beach,
dead, like so many others awash in the music of indifference.

In the Land of Maybe

In this land nothing happens.

There is

no story,
no plot,
no journey,
no destination.

There is a pall of bleakness:

a desolation of contracted horizons,
of untouchable skies

with

their pale and dark blue mockery,
wanton
drifts of cloud,
taunting, fickle winds.

No!

Everything happens

but nothing is told:

stories lie mute between stories,
plots between plots,
invisible journeys,
uncertain destinations.

Seconds stretch into minutes:

a week,
a month,
a year,
a decade,
a future.

Here,
all the flowers have died,
the flowers with their tender petals,
nodding bulbs, bright splashes of colour.

The witnesses are silent,
complicit,
while tens of thousands
sew their lips, jump from roofs,
tear their skin on barbed wire,
smuggle out letters, drawings,
seepages from their wounds.

Here,
time is a blanket, smothering,
time is a slow torture,
time is a multitude of absences.

No!

Some voices are heard
but nothing is done:
whispers in the wind —
the wind that carries everything away —
hoarse shouts, moans, pleas, cries.

Some voices are lost in static,
in decipherable;
some are too frag
men
ted

like partial, smudged, ancient scrolls;
some are heard too late,
or by ears not willing to listen.

In this land,

with its sentries and baying dogs,
with its outposts
here and here and here,

there is

no legacy,
no inheritance:

not for the meek,
not for the power hungry.

Here,

death and madness stalk,
worlds end, worlds change,

worlds go on

towards
uncertain

destinations.

Here

the voices are speaking
the voices are beseeching

hear the voices are here

the voices are

the voices are asking precisely that
which we can give
the voices are a tide ever incoming
the voices cannot be silenced
the voices are here
hear the voices are here
the voices are urgent
the voices tell stories
are books are worlds

the voices are singing
the voices are the best and worst of us
the voices will not be denied

here

the voices are
hear the voices are here
the voices are here
the voices are
the voices *are*

Then, the Moment

when you find again that you are not
up for the challenge, when all the shackles

of restraint slip away and your voice
is a howling wind, fury rises in the waves

of your veins, and you become
tempest, you become everything about

yourself that you hate, and the storm of you
lashes the trees on the foreshore,

and you watch helpless, despairing,
as they bend, as they break,

knowing that what happened then
is irrevocable, that there is no way

to mend what has been broken,
no way even to gauge the loss.

Saying Goodbye

I am saying goodbye as if eating my last meal,

eyes greedy, trying to take everything in,
hunger telling me I am not yet dying,

I am still fat with life.

I am here in the present,
thinking behind and ahead, memories and plans

mingling, jumbled in the continuum of thought,

nostalgia and anticipation together,
holding hands by the cliff's edge,

feeling the strong updraft of wind.

Sometimes choice is relinquished
to momentum or circumstance,

sometimes the wind is too strong,

the effort to resist too hard,
sometimes there is nothing to do but jump.

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