RACHEL TZVIA BACK

IN THE QUIET HILLS: LOST & FOUND LYRICS

(Proem)

Because the poem is lonely.

Lonely and enroute, toward where the word pretends faithfulness, then forgets and would forgive what was never hers to forgive:

How Time hid in the orange groves, amid dark blossoming attar of an altered embrace, altars to the possible — Love enduring, it too enroute

toward where, toward whom in the heart's ever expanding Absent –

There began the search for something *some things* in the quiet hills.

Bird / First Word

Mouth of sun and stone, lithic and latticed.

Waters unremembered. Driest dust far beyond sight and sound.

The birds of any song stayed hidden in the nests of her hair, in the parched hollows as unhallowed to walk I walked into the hills, looking for the nothing that is there. And appeared as though summoned

the solitary silver-winged one, always sudden to the grief-stunned, she who in flight slices through clearest skies, to rattle then unravel in a slight instance all its quiet lies.

Day

Day that began would always begin with night. Dusk unto dusk, ever the whole, first three stars could tell. This first abiding form. As in Eden

before Eden was formed –

that Dusk, into dark unbordered air
as with intimate infinite care
the spirit first moved over the face
of the Sleeping the quietly

Breathing his infant self and space wholly undivided. Close by you watch, to measure each miraculous breath, remnant of the world before first light: just Dusk unto Dusk.

Stars

That were jewels in the sky's blackstone mansion. Small temples for the unforgotten. Sanctuaries for lost Tidings, sent with this plea:

Give news of me to she whom I love who loves me like no other Tell her

I am here

Bound by earth thicket, beside the Well. I keep watch in the dark

for Dawn's slender orange skirt, gentle silk on more slender self, there where she waited, under the gold-domed ceiling, at the top of the glittering stairs.

The Well

What the leaves believed falling into the Well's stone-circled depth, what could I know of that. There was the shimmering light from spiraling previously unnoticed heights, then

shadows through outstretched boughs, as though fleeting embrace at now demarcated edge – and untethered Golden threads radiant then suddenly gone. In the watery darkness.

It was easy to despair, there were so many tears.

But what if after, when wooden planks were laid like splintered lids on weary and salt-rimmed eye, the dark tunnel opened

to expansive caverns and caves aglow in the Moon's water-spoken light.

There

At landscape's edge, where half-circle at horizon carves a mute path rising through nettles in late summer's brittle and silent heat –

There

is where I can see us, there where we aren't climbing to the hilltop.

I watch from my window as we move
past the stone oak, our soft-muscled backs
Side by side in bright
colored t-shirts, yours purple, mine green,
almost touching, there where we are
not I see us ascending – silently
in the distance.

Rain

Then when the rain finally came we stood at the open doorway and listened.

It was the sound of many suddenly leaving everything behind, as from the ancient always, again in flight.

The flow was illusion, each singular met the parched, the summer-ravaged ground, and earth was the swollen sound of stirring toward *safety sister home*

of the solitary, the family, the still-dreaming child — she who could ask in the night: *But what does the water want?* and hear the fragrant all fluid air answer:

To fall, and to fall - unafraid.

NOTES

Epigraph: By Robin Blaser, from "Image-Nation 5" in *The Holy Forest* (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1993), p. 117

Proem: The first lines are by Paul Celan, who writes: "The poem is lonely. It is lonely and enroute. Its author stays with it." Quoted by Anne Lauterbach in *The Night Sky: Writings On the Poetics of Experience* (NY: Viking, 2005), p. 116.

Bird / First Word: "the nests of her hair" is from Tuvia Ruebner's "Awakening": "and the birds / in the hidden nests / of your hair." In *In the Illuminated Dark: Selected Poems of Tuvia Ruebner* (HUC and University of Pittsburgh Presses, 2014), p. 55.

For "the nothing / that is there," see Wallace Stevens' "The Snow Man," particularly its final stanza: "For the listener, who listens in the snow, / And, nothing himself, be holds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." *Harmonium*, 1923 (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 11.

Day: For "the spirit moved over the face..." see Genesis 1:2: "And the spirit of God moved over the face of the waters." The Jewish day begins at sundown.

The Well: The poem's first line alludes to Lucille Clifton's poem "the lesson of the falling leaves" that opens with the line "the leaves believe." See *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton 1965-2010*. Kevin Young and Michael S. Glaser, Eds. (Rochester NY: BOA Editions, 2012), p. 157.