
Four Poems from The Face in the Window

Linda Zisquit

Apparently I forgot the remote control that opens the electronic gate in the old Renault, and all the way here (assuming I had it) I wanted to comfort Tamar whose day keeps going wrong. But I failed and failed, had to park the car blocks away and probably missed my youngest daughter. But this exercise in motion has its own restorative power, not even failure's an acceptable excuse: I must drive on. Moses smashed the tablets when he returned to see the calf. Broke the stones in order to break their hearts. Or maybe in an effort to exorcise his grief, make something out of failure, even shards. The first-week-after-the-*shiva* has no official name, just a lingering of grief, a progressive attempt to mingle, an awareness of 30 as the number of days to heal. For a year, it is said, no weddings, no clapping at another's celebration. It makes sense. To participate in the music after rending is to deny, for that note, the torn, the sewn.

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One day maybe I'll come here and let myself sleep. Bring a mattress and blanket and cover myself in this room where no matter what time I sink, tired, weary, rocking myself to think, like worshippers in *shul* who close their eyes and sway to stay awake to the prayer on their lips. If I lie down maybe she'll join me from her invisible landing, if she turns the dirt will sift around her arms and coat her lids. I'll wipe them as I did those quiet hours her skin thinned to tissue, gauze and airy wrappings I didn't recognize. Now I know the glory of those pauses, dabbing Vaseline to moisten sores, trying to heal them as another gesture crossed her openings. She was marked—how did I miss it?—by the hand of visiting forces. My eyes intent upon her couldn't see it.

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When my teacher speaks of confession as a form of redemption I think how poems do that, giving off vapors of rooms I've inhabited and liminal places like this ledge between ascending to speak and the lowest bottom into which their bodies were swallowed, where I sing like the sons of Korach mistaken and ecstatic. I quiver and cringe with a twinning insight, grant expiation out of sweetest identification, righting my wrongs as I go on listening and conspiring. Yet it must be a trick

I'm using: if what's hers is mine, a divine presence stirs behind the both of us, and I've mastered a protective process by which I'm always free! But what of the lurking sighs from the earth's stomach, and a long-suffering God who worships forgiveness, and waits to offer signs?

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Dear mother gone into the rocking earth the planet unfathomed.
 Dear mother heaving no longer from lungs we suctioned cruelly as if it mattered—oh Mom how we cheered for the molten liquid rising in your chest, still we couldn't bear your yielding to our need to reverse the leaden order. Yet we let the act persist, consulting rabbis to sanction our behavior. Mother, your face framed by your whitened hair, your luminous skin against the pillow, gave a yellowish tint to the bleached and ironed linens. Your bones seemed to rise, your lines erase. Your calm agreement never altered, you would not complain.

Linda Zisquit has published two collections of poetry, *Ritual Bath* (Broken Moon Press, Seattle, WA, 1993) and *Unopened Letters* (Sheep Meadow Press, NY, 1996) and several books of translations from the Hebrew, including *Wild Light: Selected Poems of Yona Wallach* (Sheep Meadow Press, NY, 1997). She lives in Jerusalem where she teaches and runs an art gallery. The series, "The Face in the Window," is part of a new collection of poems, *K'desha*.