
Babysitter

Yosefa Raz

Once I grew at the edges of you
 like a weed.
Your baby lay on my stomach,
sleeping in the latticed shadows of the grape arbor.
The pavement in front of your house
 was covered in chalk:
stick figure families, flowers.
The hose played across naked boys' bodies
 and everything was erasable.
The eldest woke up scared,
thought fireworks were lightening.
 I was safe with your sons
sleeping away afternoon heat in double beds,
in long, low rooms,
littered with plastic cubes, pyramids, spheres.
All your hats were white and lovely.
I could call you Naomi—
 someone to follow.
 Ruth
 clung, cleaved, like a desert plant,
 to any liquid.
Your husband:
 father of sons,
rubbed his naked foot over your back
said your name slowly.
Drove me
 home;
Said I reminded him of a girl he loved.

I could be like Ruth:
 at night, she lay by Boaz's feet,
gleaned his love,
like wheat left in the field
for widows, orphans.

I could meet you again, years later.
I could lie to you about my love life.
I could hold your newborn boy.
Your nose
 still straight and narrow as a Greek.
Your face lit from the inside, by candles.

This dusty street corner will be a lake.
This steep wide road—a river.
Turn the synagogue back into a maternity hospital
and let crowds gather on sidewalks
 like schools of fish; not like
the conquerors of Katammon.

Though I loved you, I was not Ruth,
could not follow the tracings of your robe in the sand,
 lie by his feet.

I walk along your desert-burned children.
You are a huge white bird in the moonlight:
 swan, heron,
 pale ship.
The inside of my mouth is acrid
with a hunger for sons.

"Conquerors of Katammon" is the name of a street in Jerusalem.

Yosefa Raz is a graduate of the UC Davis Creative Writing Program, where she received the Celeste Turner Wright Poetry Prize two years in a row. Her work has been published in ZZZZYVA, Jewish Currents, and Bridges, among others. Her first book, In Exchange for a Homeland, is forthcoming with Swan Scythe Press.