

LYN GRAHAM BARZILAI

Poems from

Light, Lost.

THE FIONA POEMS

Sister

You have the flight of birds in you.

Beat your wings against the summer sky,
clear your way to the sunrise,
fill yourself with the gleaming day,
open your throat with the song of it.

Let the bright spangles of your song and pain
pierce us all.

We are on the ground, flapping awkwardly—
Teach us how it can be otherwise.

Untitled

I am wearing your shirt and when I breathe in I can smell you.

We were in Mull together. I saw how your hands gripped the steering wheel as we jostled off the car deck of the ferry flanked by whisky lorries and tourist vans and you laughed and blew an ooh of relief when we bumped onto the dock.

We sailed to Staffa on a little choppy boat to see Fingal's Cave and the waves bounced off the prow and the cold spray hit us and you felt ill and leaned your head against the wooden bench we were sitting on.

And when we were tossed onto the jetty you lay down on the tufted grass and the Dutch tourists stepped over you with their cameras impatient to reach the cave and see the honeycombs. You asked me to take photos of it for you and I did and sent them to you later in the summer.

Last year I came over for a visit and asked you before I came what you'd like me to bring you and you asked for a book of my poems. As if you knew.

No-one had ever asked me for them before and no-one since.

I sat up late at night in the quiet hours of the dark and wrote them out for you no skipping those that made me blush so badly done you got them all.

In November I came to say goodbye and you had the poems by your bed and I was ridiculously pleased and also afraid that they might find their way afterwards into other hands and made you promise not to let them go and you didn't let them go.

And now it's January and you're gone.

Patching

I patch up holes,
weave back colours,
fill in blanks,
twitching away
those old tapestries
that have come unstitched.
Like Penelope, I am engaged
in waiting and weaving,
although I stitch at night
in dreams, in the time of forgetting.
I wake to find
the threads already gathered
in new emerging patterns.

There is much to admire
in these tapestries,
and like Penelope, I am proud
of my ability to deceive.
But sometimes I turn them over
and find the puckered gap,
the tug of threads across the warp and weft,
the straining picture.

Transformation

Look what's happened—
you have turned into a poem.

Leaving behind a skein of silk,
a discarded cocoon,

a broken nest.
You have opened your wings
and meshed yourself in these lines.

Here you are
with your shimmering pain,
your light-boned persistence,
your silvery triumph.

Out there in the other world
nothing but the drifting wind.
You have lured yourself into words,
you have gathered your self into verse
you have become a poem.

You Were

You were my Friday-night, 2-a.m.
whisky.
You were the giggle in my long-distance
phone call.
You were my shared distorted family
secret.
You were the hunched-up back-seat
ride
through East Jerusalem.
You were the ridiculous hand-scooped gritty sulphur
mud
from the Dead Sea.
You were that September
the jug of oranjuice
on our porch.
You were in August my grim

nightmare.
You were later the nervous
squeeze
in my intestines.
You were the twice-repeated
question:
“Tell me about your future.”
You were the crunch in
my memory

You were my last look at you.
You were

Ripe Mangoes

Today they brought him home.
Tomorrow they bury him.
A strand of dried grass, torn
from where he fell in the foreign field,
still tangles in his hair.

Outside my window the mangoes hang on the tree,
blushing with pleasure at their ripeness,
ready for the picking.
They are full of sweet exotic juice,
a tender coconut taste,
heady delight.
It's a small mango tree,
modest in leaf and branch
but generous with its fruit.
So much giving,
such readiness to provide.

I remember you too coming home
thin and pale after the battlefield
of hospital wards,
delighting in what was left of life,
ready to take and give
and taste the last flavours
of the days on your tongue.

Secrets

That summer day you told me secrets
that flew into the rafters of memory
and settled there like great nocturnal birds
shunning the light.

That same night in the Glasgow flat
(where you left your wine untouched
and the pasta scattered across your plate)
we slept in sleeping bags on the floor
and when I woke next morning
your bed was neatly rolled
and you were rocking gently at the breakfast table
in a pool of sunshine slatted
by the shutters.

Oh beloved sister, how could we not know?
Our unknowing pinned to our backs like great heavy wings
by that other secret you kept to yourself,
until it flew out of the dark barn
into the light of late August.