

Will Reger 9 poems



Pavel Popov – *Adam and Eve, Paradise Lost*

Travail

What Adam learned in the garden
he had to live with all his life.
That it was she who brought ghosts
into the world through bloody thrall
while he plowed the thick turf
God had granted him -- the ground

that gave nothing freely, though he bled
when the gritty wind pocked his face
and the soil itself bled waste against him.
How he howled to make God hear when
the cracked earth stung his buttocks,
but without words yet to reinvent himself
he lost many nights in trances.
The world was transparent to him,
sunlit and hard to withstand its pain,
yet he could see everything unfold as if
he saw it all through a glass clearly.
She will stay with him, lay down in travail
and call the ghosts that make her belly swell.

Too Far

Even as he laid claim to the privilege
(one he thought was an unescheatable honor),
he suspected he might have gone too far,
and maybe he would not survive the cost--
yet the sheer glory of it enticed him.
Everything else could be shrugged off
or lied about--he loved to double down.
This will be something for the books,
he thought, as they tied his small hands
to the rough crossbar he had had carved--
an exact replica of the original he was told.
He thought of the image this would make,
of the ratings, for he had purchased all rights
reserved in perpetuity. He smiled
at the thought of the money, of being lifted up,
and resting his head against the upright post.
Oh, the looks on their faces when he tells them
only he can save them, the adoration.
He knew his father would finally be pleased
with what he could do, and was smiling down
with the sun's sting on his butterscotch chest.
"No one can do this but me--no one.
I was given this mess, but I alone will fix it.
Look toward me and save yourselves."
These were his thoughts as the press
held up their camera phones and workmen
began to hammer in the first spikes.

Dream Lovers

Since I kissed you last night in my dream
—without warning or permission—
I've thought of nothing else:

Your lips were too soft and real
to have been dreamt, and when I awoke
I could still feel their pressure on mine.

But that look that came over you,
the shock and questions in your eyes—
What can they mean?

Are you wondering why I do not
come again and find you, save you?
As if waiting in my dream is an evil fate.

Or maybe you ask where we would live
if I did come, where would we be happy
when the worlds around us seek their justice?

Or who do I think I am, kissing you
out of the blue any time I appear and then
abandoning you again in my dream of waking?

Or why do I wait so long to come see you?
As if a dream is a place I could reach
with a boarding pass any weekend.

My answer can only be that we must wait.
You are too close to real to lose.
Your kisses remind me I am still alive:

These stolen kisses will linger for years,
though I live only in your dreams
and you only in mine.

Crows Perform a Miracle

The little dog shivered
beneath the leaves of a bush,
rattling the wire fence with her fear.
She looked up with sad eyes,
aware I stood by watching,
but she did not take her eyes
off the sharpened stick that jabbed
repeatedly at her side and throat.
She watched for an escape
through the many-eyed bush.
Three crows hacked at the air
with their dull-scissor voices, until
the world opened up and I saw
the heavens come down,
spread over the dog like a mantle
protecting her from the jabs.
She jumped and pawed at
God's very throne, grateful for
protection as I looked on,
and I, too, was shielded
from that violent hand
by the grace of a murder.

Bird Watching

The noisy terns slip back and forth
across the sharp rocks, navigating a gap,
almost in their sleep, better than I
traverse the spaces between brick walls
back home with a roof over my head.
They are as much at home here as I there,
living among their ghosts asleep in nests
built with the cooperation of mates
and no building codes for any of them.
How are they not insomniacs of anguish,
to live so openly here after their travels?
Truly, I wonder if they are safe out here—
or should I catch them all and take them
home to my bathtub until the authorities
can be gotten involved—but no, I care
less for these birds, more for my own flight.
All these birds live and die beyond my car
door windows, where I've pulled over
onto the shoulder to watch and scribble,
scribble and watch. Never certain where
bird ends and word begins. It is somewhere
out there over all that turning water.

Anatomy

My mind is a wasp beneath a glass.
My eye a geode broken open.
My tongue a toad that should have died.
My hand a spider fat and white.
My voice is a wind in a wire fence.
My hair is sea grass bleached by the tides.
My gut is a shambling hill upended.
My legs two ancient trees nearly fallen.
My cock a red-eyed snapping turtle.
My feet two hares run to exhaustion.
My bowel a rumble in the mountain.
My lungs two canyons echoing wind.
My heart a lump of gristled muscle,
 an old dog still willing to hunt,
 yearning I can hardly bear,
 time running out.

Les Accoutrements

The birds up in the trees
unbuckle their heavy wings
at the close of a summer day.
The sounds of their relief
are pleasant to listen to
when sitting late in the park.
They rub their cramping shoulders,
pour themselves a whiskey,
relight last night's cigar,
then lie back on the sofa
and contemplate their wings:
feather and bone, and gears,
leather straps and buckles
slumped in a corner.
With wings birds can be bullets
or shimmering arrows in flight.
Dainty dirigibles
dropping out of the air;
all manner of meditations
made up there, deep in the sky.
Wings give birds an edge:
miraculous wings, but still,
birds never speak of flying except,
now and then, at private parties
when all the wings are piled
on the bed in the back room
and they want to scare the fledglings
to keep them from foolishness.

A Question for the Hummingbird

How still must the hummingbird hold itself
to notice that I too am a living thing?

That I too am interested in the way flowers open?
That we--the hummingbird and I--could exchange
views for hours and not mind the time?

Neither of us love this world less than the other one,
but which of us would love the world less without the other one?

That is the question I would ask if a hummingbird
held still enough for conversation.

The Rucksack

My love gave me a rucksack
made from the heavy canvas
of love. I was eager to carry it
on the trails we followed through life.
I wanted to fill it with all the beauty
we found along the way; fill it
with food, colors, words, music,
a neatly written account of it all,
with sketches and calligraphy,
scholarly observations and poetry.
Scientific measurements and bon mots,
vignettes on wildlife and pressed flowers.
I wanted to bring the world home
in this rugged bag she made from love.

But when our journey ended,
I found the bag empty, torn, stained
with blood, grime, weariness and pain.
The canvas, though tough, was frayed,
torn, even cut by anger and knives,
and – is that a bullet hole?
So many tears poured into it,
all the bodily humors, the filth,
the agony of birth and death.
Sweat-stained and sun-bleached,
sour smelling and ruined.
My love gave me a rucksack
made of love. I brought it back
containing only my last breath.