

Five Poems

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I HEARTBEAT

**The rain comes down hard
near the tip of Africa, heavy,
in pieces, drowning out everything
leaving behind sodden land,
huge lakes in rain gutters
pulped Jacaranda flowers
skies wracked by thunder.**

**My father's heart beats.
Beneath his warm leather jacket
Beneath his white cotton shirt.**

**He lived away from the city
between two hills,
where Night came down so black
the stars fell down to your elbows.**

**Mile after mile
he'd tell my brother and me
How you couldn't trust this one...
and Had to watch your back with that one...**

**Daytimes,
after our red tin-plate lunches
of meat, sliced tomatoes and thin black bread
he'd sleep.**

**We collected peacock feathers
slipped through
dry grasses and blackjacks, pushed
between sharp strands of barbed wire
searching for the horses
we knew were somewhere.**

**My father's life was not a safe one,
I saw that.
It was a country through which he struggled daily,
a plod through landmines,
rescue helicopters all around
yet never landing for him.**

He must have seemed
to all those women
an eccentric artist,
the real McCoy.
But sooner or later they found
out they were in a war zone,
and ran for cover.

So why did he never leave
That dead-end town he lived in?

Our growing up was filled
With stories of New YorkParis&London
Places that knew how to treat a Real Photographer –
The world was waiting
Just for him.

Each time I saw my father I thought
would be the last.
I think I waited half my childhood;
Waited for him to go
or waited for him to come – he was
always late
picking us Up.

The years passed.
I let my father's words
drift over me like rain.
Watched as his
plans fall to the ground
one by one, turning
to mud underfoot.

I Told myself: Only when he's in Tibet with the monks, will I
believe he's really gone.
Only then.
But the furthest he went
Was to Cape Town on the Blue Train

It was me who left in the end.

My father's heart
beats
Me who left in the end
I can't hear it
me
But it's there
Cape Town on the Blue
Tibetan exercises to
Face the day
in the front seat
I always
His heart
heart beats
Beneath
I can't hear it
Beneath
The warm leather jacket
can't hear it
white cotton shirt

My father.

It beat when I was born
my –
And it carried on until I
was all grown up
all grown up all grown up
all—
and
and then
and then it stopped.
And I never knew
I never knew I never knew
just how
just
how justjust how
comforted I was by that steadily
beating heart of his,

until it no longer

did.

II photograph

woman stands there
straight black hair hanging
past shoulders
looks out at him from her
t-shirt, jeans and bare feet

small daughter with
feather white hair looks up, too
from cross-legged place on floor

babyboy fast fast
asleep

he saying again he must leave
not be big fish in small pond anymore
heard so many times before, like
a river in their ears

but now a suitcase
at his feet and outside
a motor running
leather jacket being put on
small one will not ever
never
forget that smell of creaky jacket

or the hugs that come from it
hard. no breath, all still.
Never forget, not even after he dead.

so I will sell the house and
then we'll join you?

Man nods, takes his camera up
as little one stands, holds out arms
to him, smiling, smiling...
shutter clicks, blonde feathers
big eyes, little legs caught for life

when he gone house is lonely
but his hunger, too, is gone
all quiet: woman breathes

they will leave and not
come back to this
shadowed-leaves on the cobblestones place

tree forked by lightning.

III the seeds

How did I lose my way,
mother?
Did you lose me?
I was not wary, walking in your fields,
the
poppies so
red and tall

When He came it was full force,
all in black
horses shuddering
I looked up and the sun arrayed
his shadow with light like a halo
mother I did face him
though fear leapt in the very air through
which He sped and stopt

It is dark here &
I am alone and this god forces me to
part from you.
He offered me food
I would not

He offered me drink
I did not

he offered me the red jewels from your garden and
I could not
refuse I
took what he held out
I held it to my lips
bit the pale sweet flesh and
did swallow six small seeds.
He smiled at me then, and there was
fire in his eyes
and loins

I am yours no longer

Mother
why did you not tell me of
hands and heart and heat and red darkness

I am yours no

Here it is too dark to feel your rage
and fire heats us day and night
Messengers come to tell us

of a cold & iron earth
a deathly sky and weakened sun yielding nothing
but bitter rains
and wild winds of war

Oh

though I am here now, yet times I
long to breathe the leaves and
light, drink the birdsong &
lie by your side, the dew soaking my skin

mother do not call me back
leave me be.

I am yours—
I am—

I—.

IV Scattered Wings

Unseen by those who live there now –
yet our imprint remains
Stamped in yellowed grass,
yells echoing in a faded pool.
Those endless games of cricket,
lime juice on ice, iced beers,
meat smoking on the beer-fed fire,
the spread-out dogs,
the dull catch of my grandmother's
amber ring against my hair
Daisies blazing white around the lemon tree,
circling us with their acrid heat,
long-winged flying ants in the evenings,
wingless long before the cool of morning spiraled by
We lived like it was forever,
lizards blinking under
bright gold skies,
dead-still, til one day the
world tore open and we ran,

Scattering.

V Home

**Beside a burning lamp,
across a field,
beneath still firs,
close to a fox's hole,
under a darkening sky,
between flowers
we listen for each other –
and in the silence of a lone owl's flight
a small home holds its breath,**

Waiting.