

POEMS

Rachel Hadas

THE PATTERN

On the train to the airport a little white dog peeps
from the tote bag in a woman's lap.
Once you see the pattern, it recurs:
origin, journey, wound, and destination,
journey originating with the wound,
destination cycling back to journey.
Band-aid, crutches, cast, that little dog:
wound we carry with us tenderly
journeying toward a cure. The destination
doubles as origin. A tall cupped candle
shines through two red hands. Interior threshold.
Journey. Crystal column. Origin.
Bath of silence where you wash your wound.

FIRST PERSONS

All those youthful outpourings featuring 'we':
To whom was I speaking?
Was 'we' no more than a gesture
Intending to demonstrate
That I came coupled,
That therefore I was desirable
And no sad solitary?
For whom was I speaking?
There must be other things to be than we.
And yet as one gets older
The 'I' fades too.
Even as the shadows of experience lengthen,

One's core seems less substantial.
Those youthful poems that did not say 'we'
Spoke as 'I' instead. But who is she?
I am not a forest nymph, a tree,
A sibyl or a goddess or a bird.
I am leaning toward transparency.
I hope to end as echo of a word.

PLUTARCH ON THE PLANE

I'm almost sure I hear
before we leave the ground
the man in the seat ahead of mine
enunciate the name
'Plutarch' on his cell phone.
Perhaps a classicist?
Possibly a professor
at the university
in the city we
are flying toward this January noon.
Maybe he knew my brother,
who taught here. Maybe he
studied in his youth
with my Plutarch-loving father.
Nothing would be more likely.
The world shrinks steadily,
or time, turned palpable,
pulls people toward each other.
As we file down the aisle,
I could easily speak to him.
Feebly or discreetly
or for some other reason,
I let the moment go,
and we get off the plane.

JonArno Lawson

THE ROOM THEY HADN'T LEFT FOR HER

They kept counting her out
it seemed inconvenient to credit her
it wasn't really
but they'd invested in the notion
that there wasn't room for her
there was room
but they'd painted themselves into a corner
in which there was no room for her
they hadn't even used real paint
the paint was imaginary
but the corner where they found themselves was real
though it wasn't really
an inescapable corner
it just felt that way,
apparently
they felt cornered, they said
and it felt bad – here I'm quoting them –
'We're in a tight corner!'
what they hadn't counted on was
it being for nothing – she was gone
as soon as they started imagining they were running
out of room
because that's when she lost interest,
and left the room
they hadn't left for her.

ELEPHANTS

He brought a small ceramic elephant
because he knew the man's wife collected elephants.
She was dead. He knew that, but somehow hadn't taken it into
account.

The widowed husband was deeply disturbed by the new elephant.
How could he welcome a new elephant into his dead wife's
collection?

Any collection of trinkets like this is fated to be incomplete,
but the moment the trinket-collector dies, the collection is
finished.

The guest saw at once that he'd made a mistake.

And even why it was a mistake.

But it was too late. The man himself was hard to get a gift for.

What were his interests? It wasn't clear. But the wife, now dead,
had a clear interest in elephants.

The man's girlfriend, who had in fact been a friend of the wife's,
tried to salvage

the situation. She knew the gift giver had meant no harm.

He could not even be described as insensitive.

The new elephant created an unbearable tension.

It could not be gotten rid of, or accepted.

The girlfriend picked up the elephant, and carried it to the kitchen,
away from

the other elephants while saying 'How thoughtful of you! How
very thoughtful!'

And this took it out of sight, and at the same time acknowledged
it, and

somehow it captured the fact that the gift giver was in fact
thoughtful, though

he'd made a foolish mistake.

There was palpable relief at that part of the evening being over,
though not even a minute had passed. The relief evaporated
quickly as if

everyone seemed to become aware that the elephant was an omen
of something worse still on its way,
and the evening had only just begun.

FLOWERS

Faded flowers in a fist
Twisted face that won't untwist
soberly knotted
wildly tangled
the living will leap
and the dead be dangled.

BY THE WAY

Words came very far without you and this

by the way

is why you must weigh the words
in the way you weigh the way
the way that has weight
so it can sustain you
and the words you want
to entertain you
must carry such freight
so that you can remain you.

About the Poets ◆◆

Rachel Hadas is the author of numerous books of poetry, essays, and translations, including *Poems for Camilla* (Measure 2018), *Questions in the Vestibule: Poems* (Triquarterly, 2016); *The River of Forgetfulness* (Wordtech Communications, 2006), and *Halfway Down the Hall: New & Selected Poems* (Wesleyan University Press, 1998). Poems published in *The Golden Road* (Northwestern University Press, 2012)

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