

LUCIENNE STASSAERT

Songs of Farewell

POEMS

Songs of Farewell

There is a song
that turns
time around

do you remember how
and now how
and now how

what a voice
would call happiness
sounds

unbearably clear
to begin with
and at the beginning

of the end?
irgendwo
irgendwo

the melody is
then
lost

do you remember how
and now how
and now how

it twinkled
and sparkled
until you heard

a bell tinkle:
love is used up
the measure's full –

A voice is left
behind
in a music-box

it does not say how
say how long
it is stuck

and the way to open
the box-lid
you still know how

and now how
and now how
you will have

to lift up a stone:
it's me, father,
let me in

no matter how
no matter how

Lady Death
as ever at hand

breathing in and out
behind April's
net of mist

the first light
that has as yet
not laid aside its mourning

and which as yet
still lets you pass –

Lady Death
I'm out on a spree with you

into the country
awake with
skewed growing pains

as buds lose their heart
full of dream-seeds
and the green force

bends over the dryness
of bramble and needelfurze –

Lady Death
I feel you deep down in my heart

murmuring like a fountain:
isn't this what's called
life after life?

Not yet. Not yet. Not yet.

The song keeps on
jumping off

winding itself up once more
and down and still

I mainly hear it
in my memory

as a signal
of a spring fire –

You wait resignedly
and oversweetly

in a room
looking out on April

on me, on him,
already so far away:

'It's not me,
it's not me,' you say.

'It is a peacock
screeching so grimly

it is the people
in the sick rooms

who for a moment
let themselves go so intensely

let their horror be heard
for all the sorrow

that they see and are...
do you recognise this refrain?"

Hello mother
you come up in me

prattling and rattling
with death in your heart

a flush of gangrene
on your cheeks

and eyes in the grip
of the night

already so far away
already so far away

the song tinkles
now and then:

'it's not me,' you say.

A small harmonium
for songs
all sorts

so my love most
loved to hear me sing

with full
half or
broken voice

what's growing
in my garden of delight –

So he took me
with him to other vistas

wakened the dark
of Florence
within me

the first birds
above a lagoon

still half swooning
with spring smoke
and terminal chill –

He just kept on rowing
as long as I kept captivating him

with refrains
in the Venetian style
or medieval unison

what's growing
in my garden maze

with full
half or
legato voice

from nostalgia
to nostalgia
for houp-la

houp-la and I locked
with a click

like a small harmonium
protected against the draught
in my song-pipes

the voice that breaks
at the end of a duet

So he most loved
to keep me
on hand

in order to coerce
the silence

with smothered
secret or
imagined voice

what's growing
in the garden of sighs?

My love, my love
was a melomaniac out of tune

who in the loading
and unloading of the leaden
plaything that I am

strained himself and snapped me shut.

Discarded with worn-out furniture
her sprung insides show
the joys and woes of an old mattress.
The kapok suddenly releases secrets
and in its lumpy burls
refrains and duets stick:

Come my love, don't withdraw
yet. Feel me over to see
if I'm a stranger once again
asking you the way to today –
I want to disappear inside
a raw body
flap as in a cave beneath the sea.

So bird-swift, with quick jerks,
this duet sounded like a duel
when in the middle of a kissed-away silence
a voice, almost choked, sprang up:
'If you die first, then I will surely follow...'

Come my love, pull me in
like a snail does its feelers.
I do not want to see the light
that whistles in my ribs –
Quickly set my coil-locked
body on fire: just one more sigh
and the bloom is gone.

With every kind of hunger

an ode to Sylvia Plath

Judging by the silence
your children toss and turn in dreams
that no father or mother knows

Those steps of yours, just now,
as if you repeatedly took a run-up
so as to leap –

No one inside
heard this rap
as a signal
to extinguish the night.

Only your fear still runs
to and fro. And feels doors, touches
tape, gobstoppers in each keyhole

to keep in the gas,
give no chance to rise.
You're already halfway.

The dark's in the stable.
Tonight you crept towards it
on hands and knees.

It hisses and sputters without a flame.
You take it in, hear a lisp
as of an after-birth voice:

Stay lying by the gas.
Do not now return to life.

As if it does not go up in smoke
while you writhe, as long as you shiver
at those gaping jaws of the oven and

in your blood-warm mouth
death on your tongue
like a musty eucharist.

From now to never the hands creep round.
And with a snap, snip, snap,
seconds drop into the hole of the night.

On your knees you give yourself up
to the ticking and clocking of a heart
that starts to lose time.

The gas sticks in your throat.
And there is still something misting,
a miserable prospect of glass-hard grief.

So you lie sunk in yourself
like a ship in a bottle.

You have been unable to seal the gap.
The gap of hunger, every kind of hunger
for more, so many more tongues of love

to lick your fire,
cause to flare up, farther
than your rage would be able to leap.

A few more breaths and your heart is a den
where the fire is stifled and all your voices are smothered.
Ariel appears in the moon-twilight –

You know this horse. That angel. This fever.
The cooking gas blows. You wait. You stay
lying there like a crumpled fan.

So finally you resemble
all the white, riddled with words
right in the rose of the poem.

How far the staircase
to the end
of the moon

the fixed stars
in clouds of gas-mist
full of angel munge
and blue spots

How far the way
to the nursery
in the midst of the pain,

The night is a falling
towards morning
and you lie hidden away
in a gas bubble –

Your blood boils, runs dead in the dark.

It is a devil's beast
this darkness

it roars in you
it stamps on you

it sucks as punishment
your frightened conscience off you

and does not cease
becoming what you always thought:

there is no fire
that chills so much
in me as I –

To caress this darkness
at a gallop

to let it evaporate
like a disease

and then furiously
to crave for life:

no devil slows you down.
You lead him to the death-leap.

What now takes place, you still recall.
All that banging on the iron chest
of a ghost that comes to perform your death.

Life goes under on the spot
as when father suddenly fell silent.
And you just running, shouting with childlike voice:
'Traitor! I love you!'

Someone's still hiding in his shadow.
A tiger man with gold in his voice,
the hands of a sower and then
the eyes of him, eyes to devour.

Oh, to climb him like ivy.
To tangle with him under hypnosis
in the name of the father, the name of grief.

Remember how love ends.

The dark lets nothing go.
So gas-thick is not even the heaven
full of gas-mist. Gas-mist. Gas-mist.

And yet. And still the lash of
'words dry and riderless,
the indefatigable hoof-taps'.

You let them go. They set off further
at a good gallop past the boundary,
the distant echoes of a final verse.

Death is up to you.

The far side

I saw her come and go,
move a chair by the window
in the house of the suicide.

She mostly left traces behind
in some writing, picture or statement
that someone had left out, neglected
to make disappear or to swallow.

Those who glimpse her in the corner
of their heart as a woman of pleasure
cherish her in a pocket mirror

in which the man with the hammer
at first only briefly glances back
into their plundered mirror image

and then no more, then no one more
who sees her come and go
by the steamed-up window.

The windowless night train
rushes over the rails
of an airline
between heaven and hell.

One and the same silhouette
squeezed between doppelgängers
fills the compartment.

It exceeds my fear
whether everything I see happening
is simply a nightmare

the umpteenth session
of a nonsensical obsession
to be underway
with so many spectres.

One tries to spell the word
that seems
to represent the goal:

mene, mene, tekell...

A vertigo
day and night
in a diamond black.

Warm is the sun-powdered head
that, little by little, begins to glow
in my hand like a blind god.

His being sleeps,
His lightly-haired nostrils
quicken in my fingers

and something in him gets a second breath
just for a moment, behind closed eyes –

I wait at the edge of the dream
for the voice of a ghost-speaker
that is my father

as soon as the past shifts
in shadows of sand-waves
at the foot of a sphinx.

You are standing in a draught, father,
holding death
ajar

as soon as I want to put an end
to what appears to be squealing,
heavy sobbing
as of a child –

Or am I the one
who in a cast
fall into the ensiled silence
which you operate, dominate and fill.

If I put your last spring
to music
there is inside me
the frenzied hurdy-gurdy
of young birds

'twit twit
don't make a slip'

the crackling light
a slap on the rocket
when in the hottest part of yourself
you burst open faster than buds

'twit twit
death was here'

if I rewind the word
that lay on your lips
until

Words too white
to listen to
cause distance to recede
which you first saw descend.

The horizon, condensed
in clouds, will lead to
nothing but ripples
in deep light –

How long loss
stays neither notion
nor loneliness, where
no one is

will word for word
still be reflected
in images
peregrinating in the flat leaf.

The night a gangway
to go on board

although the tide does not
turn in your dreams

it encloses you in
the incomplete

the narrow rings of
someone you think you

have been, who still
wants to find in you
a mouth to the light –

This sailing blindly
at word's door

in the tide
is no more

no less than
impressing on oneself how

dark the far side
towards it.

Until you have reached the bottom
the loose pebbles of the now

there is of music
a bird left over

a blackbird beat in
already sunken trees –

Ever closer
the dead

on the yonder rim
no far side

no spied sign of time
though the sea whets her many voices

she lifts you out
of her starry gravel

when you cross the bank
a former sailor
at the end of his night.

Ever closer

to drawings by Dan Severen

He places time
in the sign
of a cross-bar window

takes charge
of freedom
and leaves light

the naked vista
of an unwritten silence
that sets him in motion.

No other sign than plus and minus
and more a sign of reconciliation

to tune in time
where still a trace of colour is detected

only in keeping secret
all that is rampant within him –

Not to appease, not as his longing,
an indivisible instant.

Nothing but muted
gentle-long tremors

in the nerves of the white
the pulse of the dark
one instant self-evident –

scarcely almost never
without counterpart
in the tone of a beacon.

This quivering in semitones
wants to impute the light a sign,
let read, speak of –

Word that lies on lips
ever closer
tormenting his life

at the cross-roads,
the sharp of an image
on the inside of silence.

A show of shadow
in an omen
and in the innermost seam
a point of rest

round which emptiness
quietens down
that wants to remain incomplete –

No one causes doubt
to waver in such a way
and to the surface.

How again and again
his hand opens a space,
hesitatingly

picks up the track of a sign
finally
the inexpressible

has emerged in the white
and then,
ever more absent,
becomes a vanishing point, for good.

Dan, still in mourning
for a lost peace
what takes its leave

in life
holds a sign
that ripples outwards

in your hands, cruciform,
till it reaches the limit
of your existence

leaving in an abundance
of loss
something behind,

to release
from everything that ties
pain to emptiness.



La Folia*
variations

There is a fiddler
one underground

a blind man who
almost always

is recognisable
in backlight.

His head moves up and
down his hand

lets strings
trill against the grain,

strokes the shadow
of a star

falling star
that guides him

and once more
strikes him blind.

How he waits without
making a sound, in the same breath

the commotion of
hurrying footsteps

suggests his life
abroad.

What else lies
at the beginning

of the light
he scans with all his fingers.

In one movement he tosses himself up.
So feather-light no sorrow is,

So straightforward no longing
to emerge as a glider-man.

He wants to go far, although his flight
puts far deeper voices in a fix,
lamenting sounds from his land of origin.

He pushes them up. His strokings
lead him to the night lodging
of his faithful parting angel

who tunes him in all he wants to sing
to nameless deprivation.

How many names would I not
invent for him
in the course of the music.

As a fiddler he assumed
so many forms,
possessed the gift

of an aerial being
to appear to be
an inspired lover

and from time to time
looked like a messenger of good tidings
who in my cradling lap

so not to die from love
would crack my heart
like a hard nut.

It was not him. He did not choose
a single of his transformations
to tell me who he was.

He is the Beauty and the Beast,
constantly holds me in his grasp

and tunes me up
and tightens me
for a legato ensemble.

He either cures me
or I play around

the pain which he commends to me
in new pre-dawn hours
that seldom offer hope on hope.

He plays a game
with Lady Death

foretells departure
in a double stopping
and lets love sing itself out.

She comes to him
as a motif

a steep ascent
to mordant trills
with his delight as counter-sun.

What else is she
than a voice

that charges him
to quiver to
the very end

when he brings her out
in his bow's broad sweep.

For all the hours,
the turning sour of mortal scraps of time
he knows where blessing can be found.

How distant now the day when I
would see him as a stranger,
a master of the ineffable.

In future I will know him blindly
almost always in the greatest depths of light.

His strings bring blue
into view, misty blue

that flows out of him
like a night-time tide

as if he is the bank himself,
the border of a pulsing silence

lasting
so long in him

that he hears
the soul

of his fiddle sigh,
how in him it rests in peace.

