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Poems

Graham Mort

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Poems

Abstract

STEPS, MOON LANGUAGE

'Leave him be. He's got school tomorrow.'

'Nah, I got something for him and I want 'a give it to him now, 'cos he's a good kid, that kid of mine. He understands his old man, don't ya, tiger? Look what I got for ya.'

'Elsie?'

'What?'

'Where's he gone, Elsie?'

'What?'

Night gaped at the window; the curtains waved goodbye.

Graham Mort

STEPS

The boy is walking
Out of the future,
Clutching the chair arm
Under his arm
Like a teddy bear.
It pulled clean off.
It bewilders him.
His grandmother may be angry:
He does not know.

The man lying in the road
Under his crashed motorbike,
The old woman pegging out
A clean sheet are dazzled
By the same sun;
The light sets off like a sprinter.

Tonight the moon steals back
Its pale cuticle;
The man sleeps between stone sheets,
His pulse just there,
Only just there.
The old woman rocks in her chair,
Folding her thoughts around him
Where he sprawls in her tears.

The boy she does not know,
Holding the accident
That has not happened
Pauses at the road edge,
Then steps softly into her,
Finding the path of bone
Smooth under his feet.

MOON LANGUAGE

1 THE POEMS

If they will allow words,
Let them be the thread that
Stitches our fabric of speech
From which freedom will unfurl:
Let us take an end each and begin
The tapestry of our lives.

First there will be parents,
Brothers, sisters,
Set-speeches,
Antecedents of all kinds.

Then there will be the birds
That woke us from the womb
On that first morning,

The ravenous birds that still
Gather for the utterance
Which falls from our lips.

And if they will not allow
That our words are not crimes
Do not let your hand falter,
But take this life-line,
This umbilical of grammar,
Lexicon of blood and memory,
Take it and stitch patterns
From the dark in your head,
As the blind women weave
In our concrete reservations.

And remember the vineyards
Where there is now snow,
The settlements
Where stone circles fall,
The hand across the book,
As I remember yours.

Then let our children come
To trace the pattern with their fingers,
The meaning with their tongues.

2 THE GOLD WATCH

The gold watch tocks
At the bedside, tongue
Clucking time in its
Little yellow mouth;
A mouse scurries under the dresser,
The mahogany monument my father
And I hauled upstairs inch by inch.

Outside,
Late cars change gear
For the corner;

Inside,
Her breathing takes on
The deeper tone of sleep.

The children rock in their bunks
In the room above, their heads
Burrow into pillows damp
From the sweat of dreams.

Rows of books faintly gleam;
The dark had discarded their titles.
The typewriter, the desk, the pen,
Are slowly disappearing.

And in the language
That is indecipherable,
With words translated
From the meaningless,
With poetry — the password
Our sentries have forgotten —
I count her dark hairs
Across the pillow.

3 MOON LANGUAGE

This is moon language that
The children are speaking:
They have invented it out
Of the scrapyards of speech.

They name it, laughing;
They chide, gibber and pray
In its cobbled syllables
And we recognize not one word
In the tangle of fires still burning
Behind the eyes of the young.

This is not churchbells,
Or judgement, this is not

Gunfire from that quaking horizon,
It is the laughter-cratered talk
Of children with thin arms
Small desires, huge hope.

And this is you, following
Your own spoor across a desert,
Dragging your feet across sand
To the sulphuric aridity at
The boulder's heart beating
In your own chest.

But the children will begin counting
In moon language and your years
Will leak into warm stains from
Which footsteps will quicken,
And you will be running towards yourself,
And you will be laughing.

Keki Daruwalla

THE LAST WHALE

When the last whale passes into our Lord's keeping
how will the funeral go?
Will the last post ring out, will there be muffled drums?
A dead Viking, we are told, was laid out
in all his regalia — the mail-shirt unflapping,
his painted shield hanging along the bulwarks,
his drinking horn to remind us of his revels,
sword and battle-axe in memory of his rages.
And they hoisted a square sail
handing boat and body to the wind.