Poems

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Abstract
WHEN THE TIGHTROPE YOU’RE WALKING IS UP AROUND YOUR NECK, A PAINTING OF WEST BERLIN, 1989 for Susan Holder, WHO’S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?
Peter Bakowski

WHEN THE TIGHTROPE YOU’RE WALKING IS UP AROUND YOUR NECK

The heart on my sleeve
is at the dry cleaners,
a flock of tea-bags
just circled the house
and the kettle won’t boil:
says that it wants to be
a poet.

The grandfather clock’s
taken up line-dancing,
the hairs on my legs
have gone off to Borneo
to do missionary work
on a bald man’s head.
Someone’s gone and got the salad
a girlfriend,
and my goldfish
is wearing dark sunglasses:
says that it wants to be
a detective.

All my theories about life
are on sick leave,
tonight, I feel I couldn’t even
dial a wrong number.
It’s a good time to
get out of Melbourne:
my undone shoelaces and I
hop into a cab.
Leaving feels good
to my bones and my heart:
I watch the meter’s red digits
wink me free.
A PAINTING OF WEST BERLIN, 1989
for Susan Holder

Courtyard voices vine up,
the traffic grinds its raw noise.
The waitress would like to bring you
a bowl of her tears,
but she just presses down harder
on her pencil instead,
thorning your order
to the cook’s board.

A long, beautiful bug
climbs the dusty afternoon window.
You have another coffee,
wondering, where are
the new world kings?
the press barons ...
but it’s better instead
to think of fishermen
under a cathedral of mist,
with chess white swans,
all poised upon
their fluid dominion.

The old Turkish men
snap at the calves of passing young women.
But, pigeons at their feet,
leaning on their canes,
I am still moved by
something in their pride-burnt faces,
that speaks to me
of knowledge earnt
in exile’s hard season.
And the artists too 
evacuate afternoons
in the cafes where
their loud intimacy
is almost expected,
talking of
projects in the making
and
relationships in the ending.
They preen and confide,
spill rumour and envy,
they hang their hats and hearts
on that artists' scarecrow cross
of enthusiasms and excuses;
and the moon, that gladly collides
the egos of lovers,
shines down
and abides
their feverish, exhaustive
searching.

And so the people sit,
amongst fountains and jugglers,
looking for
the truth in books and lovers:
swans of word and touch
that will take them beyond
the pummelled history
of all this city's
nights and streets.
WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?

Ravenous hands:
the heat of their swimming
over bare back and belly.
The lock of eyes
that dare the pulse
to cross the flaming bridge
of a kiss ...

It has begun:
nights of bile and storm.
Threats boil and toss,
to lie shipwrecked
in old wounds.
Hatred is an art,
lovers do it very well,
a shoe explodes a window,
logic is a burning fuse.

The man of the house is tired,
fill his bowl with gin
to blur the sight of the wife's thighs
muddied by the neighbour,
empty another glass
to loosen the barbaric.

No last chance child
in this wish-spilt house
to gladden the stairs
with the 1-2-3 of innocence.
All these years of nights,
candles and promises burning down,
too many ending
in door slam
and the chess of hurt
that leaves
each player vanquished.