

Two Poems by Natan Zach translated from the Hebrew

by tsipi keller

AS AGREED

Look, as we promised each other,
we changed nothing and the world
is as wonderful as it was, the rain
carries this year, but it will come:
it will come as long as we're still here.

Look, as we agreed,
I am in one place, you in another.
We didn't become one, which is also natural,
and in your weakness and in mine
there looms a promise, too:
after memory forgetfulness is all.

And if the road already may incline downward
in the famed sloping print of life's curve,
it does, in some sense, aspire upward,
and aspiration is a great thing in life,
on this, too, we agreed, you surely remember.

And if now I'm alone and aching and ailing more than ever,
this, too, was a choice,
if not always conscious. And if you too are alone,
it makes my loneliness less just
and this should sustain you as well.

How fortunate that we've agreed on so little:
on parting, on loneliness and fear, the basic certainties,
and there's always something to return to,
you will see how young we will be in the end,
and the end, when it comes, will be almost just.
And everything, you will see, will be almost welcome.

THREE POEMS THAT WEREN'T WRITTEN

1.

I wrote greetings for a friend's wedding.
My lover peeked over my shoulder and said:
Thank God, you're writing lyrical poetry again.
I met my friend after his wedding
and he said: Even the dishes I love the most
she can't cook.
This, too, I included in the poem.
My lover read and said: You persist in writing
such everyday stuff, you do it only
to annoy me.

I went to visit Israel who was wounded.
We had to make an effort so he wouldn't notice
how hard it was to look at his face:
it was as if the odor of burning still stood
in the room and the odor of charred flesh,
and the only eye left seemed as if
it had moved from its place, if such a thing is possible,
I'm no doctor.

When we came home my lover said:
Now, for sure, you'll write a political poem.
I told her: No, it's still the same poem.
And she asked: What's it about?

I said: About the times gone mad,
except that we've learned to live with it,
which is a great evil;
and a man's life is as hard as ever,
we've seen it all before,
but we mustn't announce it so as not
to disseminate fear and confusion.
She said: And that's a poem?
And I said: No, indeed, it didn't come out too well,
you're right, I've decided to scrap it.
I'll only publish this
so at least they'll know what it contained.

2.
The second poem came to me in a dream,
and I spoke to it: Welcome, you're so beautiful,
it's been a while since you came to me,
such a beautiful poem.
But when I awoke I couldn't remember a thing,
which made it all the more frustrating.
But perhaps this is the price one has to pay
for waking up.

3.
The third song is sung and played on a luxury liner.
A luxury liner, all lit up, sails from Haifa Harbor.
You can't hear the song from where I stand.
O sail away ship of my youth, to remind me
that nothing begins nor ends here.

