

EVA TIHANYI

The Love Song of Dora Maar

1

It all begins with the mouth,
but I don't know this; for a time
remain convinced it begins with the eyes
which watch me play my little blood game,
the knife thrown down between my fingers
as they lie spread on the wooden table.

Your friends say that art should be convulsive,
and so it is, the vulgar rose
that masquerades as your heart.

Your mouth will be a later cruelty.

2

The first time you come to me
I take surreptitious pictures of you.

They remain my secret, these negatives
which I never print.

In my drawer you will remain
black and white reversed, forever radiant.

Your image: caught lightning.

3

You note my hands, their slenderness,
long tapering fingers, carefully manicured nails
in various colours – blue, green, red, black –
whatever my mood that day.

You come to see me as a clawed and clawing
creature:
Sphinx, phoenix, always something hungry.

You are afraid you might fall under
my unpredictable nails, that I will tattoo you

with invisible private hieroglyphs
while you press versions of my various selves
into paint,
hold them there forever, my artist jailor.

4

Mougins, 1937.
The world still light, the darkness on the horizon
not yet arrived.

We play at poetry, pass our words
back and forth on hotel stationery, each
determined to outdo the other.

It is forever hot noon, the sun at its zenith,
the time when our shadows are smallest.

I cage you under the bamboo awning,
create you in stripes, light and dark alternating.

At night like spies
we watch each other sleep,
own each other best then.

5

The heaviness of all the unsayable things.

How do I stop considering you?
How does one feign indifference to the sun?

6

1941.
Although the world turns on itself, feeds
on its own entrails, its numerous and lavish
horrors,
we abide.

My fingers boast dark talons sharp with rage. 8

You paint me with a black cat
on my right shoulder, your pagan goddess
on a soon-to be-toppled throne.

Private Lilith, sorceress, terrifying muse.

7

Exacerbated summer,
ferociously lit.

You use me up.
I am the fuel, consumed.
Those who look too closely
will burn their eyes.

In the perfect sun:
my heart a seed, concentrated and silent;
my skin open to the light that bores in
through every pore.

Each day I am a darker version of myself,
a latent explosion, a small star gathering inward.

You paint me as a bird.
You paint me ravaged by the Minotaur.
You paint me as angles.
You paint me in pieces.
You paint me in tears.

I am a prism
through which you break
into all your magnificent colours.

9

Later I will say, *After Picasso, God.*
For now: one and the same.

But beware, my gargantuan little hero:
I channel the wounded wolf
and there is appetite in all my actions.

Everything eats, one way or another.

Eva Tihanyi has taught at Niagara College since 1989 and lives in Toronto and Port Dalhousie (St. Catharines, Ontario). This poem first appeared in Flying Underwater: Poems New and Collected, her seventh book of poetry. She has also published a collection of short stories, Truth and Other Fictions (Inanna 2009).

INANNA PUBLICATIONS

Flying Under Water: Poems New and Selected by Eva Tihanyi

Anne Michaels calls Eva Tihanyi's poetry "moving and powerful." Susan Musgrave calls it "very accomplished, beautifully crafted." Now, almost 30 years after her first book was published in 1983 comes Tihanyi's latest collection, *Flying Under Water: Poems New and Selected*, which brings together the best of her previous six volumes plus a group of new poems.

Flying Underwater is "...Another outstanding offering ... by Eva Tihanyi. Tihanyi's poetry is often wise, with lines you want to read aloud in order to savour both their wisdom and their beauty. Her keen eye (she also practices photography) is attuned to the dance of desire, vulnerability and need in relationships."

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