

*Trembling  
of the  
City*

SAMPLER

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Hagit Grossman

*Trembling*  
SAMPLER *of the*  
*City*

*translated from Hebrew by*  
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# Evolution

I was once a paleolithic painter, a sensual hunter  
plundering the earth, living from hand to mouth,  
I painted at the cave's corner, concerned only with the day's concerns.  
Faithful to nature, I rendered beauty straight and pure  
Sketching motion in lightning strokes,  
I saw nuanced shades finer than fine.  
I did not know of shadows  
Believed neither in gods nor in the world to come.  
I lived in an age of actions.  
Then I fragmented and fissured the world into  
reality and beyond  
the visible and the hidden  
the mortal and the soul.

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## Defective Evolution

I sense evolution is defective  
no guitar sprouted forth from me where it should,  
my parents immigrated to the wrong country,  
and Paris is too far away.

I sense evolution is defective  
the fingers are too lazy to tell the gospel,  
Romance drowned herself in the stream,  
and the brackish waters demanded their due after her demise.

I sense evolution is defective in those volumes of poetry:  
words are dragged by their hair into the green reeds  
and played across the stream,  
their blind sputtering verses afloat,  
adrift beside corpses of rock'n'roll,  
intellectuals, poets and all the others  
who whored themselves  
to adapt to the atmosphere.

I sense evolution is defective  
on the seam that separates laptop and typewriter,  
My libido never awakens to the glows of a screen  
but paper arouses me.

I sense evolution is defective  
once I declaimed poetry on stage with an orchestra  
once I soared with the music.  
Afterward I couldn't utter a single loveless word  
Afterward I knew I'd touched the loveliest thing I'd ever know  
and ever since I sense evolution is defective.

# Trembling of the City

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## My Tormentlove

Forgive me if I fall on your shoulder  
Inside the wind is too strong  
I ought to scream now and become sick, it is a sickness of war  
The wind erupts red from my hair which hid all winter  
Between the books  
And a madman who was not afraid to love a woman  
Made me feel special  
Came to wish me good night  
And to make me a cup of tea.  
Behind the wall, a woman screamed on the staircase.  
Bathed in sweat, I lay beside him  
A slave to the love of strangers,  
My mouth torn upwards, my arms sent into the air  
The tea spilled, puddled on the tablecloth.  
I'll never forget him, that time when all the paintings were in purple  
But one day the door swung open and I saw he had aged.  
He laid himself out in my room, I asked him to stay,  
And I dressed in his clothes.

# You

1

I remember how Jerusalem  
made wolf's teeth grow in my mouth  
and I would lurk for you in the streets.  
If you had come across me —  
that coldness around the pupil,  
that strangeness —  
I would have gashed you with my teeth  
and howled to God:  
Thank you, thank you.  
Maybe you will never know  
how you were Death to me  
and the more I chose you the more there lived within me  
the illusion. And the body, that was made  
for the love of your flesh, sprouted flesh  
and my belly gushed forth pure love  
I hide in my room  
and the blood that had made dreams quake  
turns now to terror  
casts off the essentials of love.  
This terror has scissors that cut breath,  
that crush air into a blinding dust  
and the river of splendor flows through life  
washing away remorse as it courses down  
and whenever I hear children singing  
the wounds of your memories are forgotten, clarified away like fools.  
Even through the heart of illusion flows the river of life  
and the poem is the holding-point inside it.

You who were my Death  
climb now from the cellar and hover in the gloom  
my soul was in your hands  
like a gypsy girl on her wedding day  
my dress is a flawless white  
your body, hurtful, is fixed in my flesh.  
All the way from you to me  
I heard footsteps behind me  
I turned to find no one there  
the footsteps were my own.  
I wanted to be wonderful for you  
but only the attraction and the lies were real.  
All the way from you to me, my voice kept me alive,  
it enveloped me in the poem's skin  
buried in my heart a subtle clear Spring.  
Your mouth's vapor in mine  
a grey river blowing  
on all that was in me before you  
and all the waters know it is me.

## Jerusalem in South Tel Aviv

Tonight the last wall between us crumbled  
and your secret fell into me.  
Tonight I knew that always, always.  
In the darkness  
everything you don't say is whispered:  
Yeho-Natan, God has given me your love  
that I will know a word which chases fear away  
and in this word is Jerusalem.

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## Distance

The distance from you was as real as glass shards scraped over flesh  
If blood spurts from me, you will play the fool and make me laugh  
You don't fear me, it would be terrible to leave you  
The city's darkness whispers the distance from your body  
I face the letters naked  
Like when I lay on the bed crying  
and you wiped down my wet body with a damp cloth  
and I thought I might die in a moment if you did not leave.  
And your voice roped around my neck  
and I went to the shower and the rope is dragged behind me.  
I wanted to paint the wall yellow and you waited for me on the bed  
I wished that you would disappear, that I could be someone else  
and you painted the walls purple  
the bedroom blue  
and the girl's room pink  
and on her wall we discovered the name you gave her  
engraved in timeworn letters,  
and you knew you had powers of sorcery  
and I knew it too.

# Trembling of the City

The interior city trembled  
and I sensed a need to feel truly sorry and beg forgiveness  
to know that the city would never be the same  
because the trust and quiet in the dark alleys of its heart had been disturbed.  
In the middle of the living-room we let outside observers get involved,  
and come in and sit on the red sofa.  
And they have that realistic look of math teachers  
with their cold glances and high salaries  
and we are locked into poetry books  
we are a citadel whose walls have fallen  
because I let anger burst through and curse what was.  
And those observers with the cold glances  
said they came with love  
and admitted that we had entrusted them with a great power  
capable of razing sacred cities.  
And you no longer gazed into my eyes, you became distant,  
You turned off the light and went to sleep,  
Leaving me beside you in the dark  
I whispered your name, but you gave no reply  
I wanted to feel sorry and beg forgiveness  
and touched your warm body, and you did not touch me back.