Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Lin Benedek: Three Poems

Lin Benedek · Thursday, January 27th, 2022

Forget Everything I Am about to Say

Be a shy child. Find solace in furry creatures
and rocking chairs.

Fear abandonment. Feel
unlovable. Above all, carry shame.

Smoke too many cigarettes. Find your worth
in the opinion of others.

Die inside
when your mother dies.
Believe me: It’s your fault.

Drink. A lot. You’ll be bolder on alcohol.

Decide not to love
or need anyone like that again.

Resist philosophy and its easy answers.
Do not make peace with impermanence.

Drive
too fast on mountain roads, coast downhill
with the engine off and rely heavily
on the brakes.

Laugh when others say all you ever wanted
was to love.

Ignore random signs from the universe.

Do your best to override any rosy opinion of yourself.

Try not to watch the geese glide effortlessly
across the surface of the pond.

*

Wicked Games

> *The harmonica is the best-selling musical instrument of all time. You're welcome. ~* Bob Dylan

He's a dubious cat, our teacher, around sixty, with Johnny Cash hair and sideburns. Over these next two hours he's going to teach us Harmonica for Health and Blues Harp for Beginners.

My husband and I walk in minutes late and the teacher's not happy.
The old lady next to us is hard of hearing.
She says *What'd he say?* Her old man says *Shuddup.*
Overgrown teenagers, like us.

I ask about our teacher's favorites:

"Christo Redemptor," Charlie Musselwhite
"Wicked Games," Gemma Hayes
"Roller Coaster," Little Walter

Have fun with your harp he says.

We want to learn to play like:

James Cotton
Stevie Wonder
Taj Mahal
Tom Petty
The Rolling Stones
The Doors

We're Baby Boomers. We never grow up.

Love Your Harp he says.

He shows us licks, trills, flutters, draw and blow, air from the throat, pucker vs. tongue block and the almighty tongue slap.

Paint the harp with your tongue in little strokes, he says. *Be one with the instrument.*

She wants French kisses.
Pucker won't do.

Whoo like an anxious, excited owl
Did-der daddy is your jam

Hit those dirty notes
Hold it with your left
even if you're a rightie.

Fun facts on the back of the Hohner box:

At the Illinois debate Abe Lincoln went toe-to-toe
with Stephen A. Douglass, who had a bandstand
orchestra to back him up. Unfazed, Abe said

My trusty harmonica will do.
At the end of class our teacher hard-sells the practice CD
containing all his tricks. So we can hone our Hohner skills
in the privacy of home.

The old lady and her man are smiling now.

My old man and I are smiling, too.

Turns out you can teach an old dog new tricks.

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Architecture: (a) as History; (b) as Aphrodisiac

I interview the old man, my father-in-law, about his first eighty
years on the planet

and on a napkin, he draws a map of his childhood home,
built around a courtyard in Orashaza, Hungary,

where his father owned the town textile store, called,
in translation, *Young Married Woman of Szeged.*

He says the black décor makes the restaurant *un peu funèbre*. A bit
funereal.

II

Generations come. Generations go.

His father, his father's father, my father, my father's father, all
the fathers.

And all the mothers of all the mothers stayed home.

We sit under the clock in the Beaux Arts station home of the Musée
d'Orsay and visit his old building on Rue des Grands Augustins.

Paris. Home to High Gothic, Flamboyant, Belle Epoque,
Art Nouveau; majesty and ornament.

III

At our hotel French doors lead to a balcony framed in ornate
ironwork.

The sun is rising to extinguish the night. The river is rising.

Citizens are rising all around the city.

The sun is rising. The bread is rising. The steam is rising.

Rising to fill the empty space that waits in my body.

We look toward the window
and see something shimmer
behind the veil.

In a white bedroom in Paris,
hesitation slips through the tiny waist
of an hourglass.

Forsaking allegiance to our separate selves,
we slip into history. We slip into the dream.

Purchase *Singing Lessons* by Lin Benedek

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