

DANIEL LIPARA

from **LIKE THE NIGHT INSIDE THE EYES**

Translated from Spanish by Robin Myers

When my mother, Liliana, died, we traveled to the beach. Dad and my sister and I chose a hotel room as she was buried four hundred kilometers away, in a private cemetery in Buenos Aires. Your mom isn't there, Dad said, she's here with us, the ones who love her. At Jardín de Paz, the plots are named after fruit trees, there are birds, leaves scattered on the ground. My grandparents said their goodbyes, my aunts and uncles, the curandera who did her reiki and love knots. That's what they told me. The next day we drove to the mountains. The car climbs the gravel road flanked by cabins. Nine and thirteen, my sister and I clamber up the rocks. There are valleys around us, a lake, pines on the bank, the smell of grass. There's sun and wind because it's spring. Then the horse appears. In my memory, the white hair gleams like a lamp and the horse is my mother.

as a poppy
bows its head under the weight of seeds and rain
the neck yields the head hangs

the Trojans build bonfires
like stars
lit around the moon a windless night
the mountain peaks visible
the valleys every cliff
an indescribable light from the sky
and the shepherd is happy

Teucer hides under the shield of Ajax
as a child hides behind his mother's skirts

an unbearable pain tears at the heart
as when the north wind and east wind
exhale open-mouthed and the sea tears
the black waves hang
vomit seaweed onto shore

I risked my life says Achilles
as a bird
brings whatever it can hunt to its featherless chicks
and is left with nothing

Phoenix says I fled home and Peleus received me
like someone who loves his son
the beloved son he had in his old age

A wave is going to sweep me away with force. It's suspended at the end of the street, swelling from within. I dreamed of it often, unable to outrun it. When I was fifteen years old, I ran away from home. I answered an impulse that came out of nowhere, couldn't be stopped. Where there was fear, I was flooded with intent. My sister Nadia was watching TV. I left on quick legs glancing back in case Jorge my dad came after me in the car. As in a dream when you can't escape from someone who can't catch up with you. I reached the payphone, my best friend invited me to sleep over. Ana rinsed tomatoes, sliced onion, fried everything in olive oil. The house smelled of ground pepper; Silvia her mom wasn't home. We see each other naked for the first time, her eyes glow. Her body is small, white, freckled. I ran away and fell in love at the same time. Jorge called that night and his breath was like a thread of air, sometimes he spoke. What if they get kidnapped in a taxi. What if your daughter doesn't come home from school. He wanted to take what he believed had been taken from him. Because the way he saw it was: I'd gotten carried away. And maybe so. Whatever drives a person is the impulse that urges the waves against the ridge, the deer leaping through the forest. It's the river bursting its banks the wind shaking a pine. The poem calls it what it calls the chest, calls it spirit, force. The organ pumping arms and legs. An inner voice saying now.

thousands of boys run
like a cloud
that black slab coming
suspended over the ocean roughing the waves
the shepherd watches trembling on the slope
sees the cloud closing in on him
coaxes his goats into a cave

Like when you're about to fall asleep and the mind flutters. I hear scraps of song women's voices I see pregnant girls on the beach. Hecamede daughter of Arsinoos trophy of Nestor cleans the wounds of the men who killed her parents. Tecmessa holds Ajax's baby in her arms. Each night Uza listens to Ulysses talk about his wife after he rapes her. None of them is older than twenty. They spend their days weaving they sing their lungs packed with cotton. In the afternoons they sit in the sun and eat olives. The camp looks deserted. The waves shout. There are statues left of blank-eyed gods. Thousands of shelters embers on the ground. Beyond the grasses and rivers the plain the bodies uncremated for the dogs and birds. And beyond them her home. At night they bathe the men. They serve grilled meat and platters of onion. They mix wine with honey goat cheese flour. They bring perfumed water to wash with. Then they lie down in their cots hoping not to be called hoping today the men won't want to. Force takes many forms says Weil. The most brutal belongs to someone who hasn't yet killed. It makes a thing of you. The victim freezes twists into adaptation. An imitation of nothingness. Like a horse tethered to the cart she says. The reins and crops and brakes erase all paths but one.

like when a mother's running late
and her daughter wants to be carried
won't let her walk tugs on her dress and cries
until she's lifted

as in the autumn
the earth strains heavy in the storm
and the sky god rains down weary of men
who forget the gods are there watching them
now the rivers overflow the hills are islands
the water roars and sprints to sea
people's labors disappear

And the cow's blood cools the steam melts into the chest. A residue of voice coats the throat the breath vanishes. And the mind snuffs into darkness. Like when someone stares at the grocery cart forgets what they were looking for. A son is blotted from the mind. When did she see him how long has it been night. Who wheels over the white blossoms like bats.