

JUDITH HERZBERG SONGS OF LAMENT



DE HARMONIE

JUDITH HERZBERG

Songs of Lament

I

Like a ruined city once bursting with beauty
and life, she sits there, lost, needy.

Friends from before
particularly the closest, the ones who always came,
evenings and nights of us enjoying
my exuberance
and me in my glory,
are the people I no longer see
they avoid me, a wreck now.

At night tears roll down
her gentle cheeks.
None console her
even those who loved her
are disloyal, become
enemies.

Driven into a corner by brutes
to be left behind by them there.

JUDITH HERZBERG – *Songs of Lament*

~ 2 ~

II

Covered in dirt
that clings to the creases
of her clothes.

This is not what she imagined,
no never, naïve as she was
to look forward to such squalor.

They avoid her,
animosity ballooning into ridicule
that becomes self-ridicule.

III

Today there is no room
for any more setbacks
In my black-placarded devastation.

JUDITH HERZBERG – *Songs of Lament*

~ 3 ~

IV

The young lions
have set about roaring
so loudly, so rowdily
a terrible displacement of air
ravages the country
burning the city,
those who could, fled.

V

Wretched, wretched
and so wretched
that wretchedness was wrought
into rage. Yet still
wretchedness and rage
were not enough
as ever not enough.

JUDITH HERZBERG – *Songs of Lament*

~ 4 ~

I still have to learn the language of mourning
 master that language, avoid words like *deep*
sorrow, they are for everyone
 else, for everyone who is not
 me, I heard those words often
 enough before; didn't sink
 in. Learn a new language
 with new words.
 Bursts, cracks.

Accustomed as I was
 to believing in an end
 to misery. But this drought
 is a drought without
 end. Aridity like this
 cannot be overcome.

And dew, once sweetly
 glistening consolingly
 now gleams threateningly.
 Billions of tiny droplets
 triumph briefly
 before disappearing.

The language of mourning
 sticks in my throat,
 yet I must learn it
 and make it mine.

VII

A house ought to sing
but our house is silent.
The windows hang crooked
in their shrunken frames,
they are misted, a single wipe
and you catch a glimpse
of what *seeing* could have been.
The doors stick,
crack, the latches
already melted, or frozen
and when I go in or out
the wood complains, moans
like an animal tied up
no longer tolerating the constraint.

We should not disappear
our breath fills the space
I inhale air which
has travelled through your lungs
you, mine.

JUDITH HERZBERG – *Songs of Lament*

~ 6 ~

VIII

Since you went so away
so further away than I can imagine
it is as though anything I say
were put in my mouth by you
as though I were infected
with what you just couldn't quite
say anymore.

Although – the greatest loss
is that, however hard I try, I
cannot hear you talking
to me. The desire to
hear you again is strong
but not so strong
that I could give you
your own words again.

Of course not – you keep
silent and will stay silent.
What is left of you in me
– I know this law
of touching the forgotten –
must evaporate.

I beg of you:
Leave my memories intact!
As if you still might be able
to come and steal them.

JUDITH HERZBERG – *Songs of Lament*

~ 7 ~

IX

'It's good to be home'
It would be good to be home
It would be good if a home were –
It was good when there was a home
Habaïta, habaïta, habaïta.

Where is a good home
Where was a good home
Was there a good home
if only there were
Where? A good home?
Habaïta, habaïta, habaïta.

X

Awake or still dreaming I make my way
along tramped down paths through the few standing
ruins I stand as though looking for a view,
on rubble heaps as high as mountains and
that constant grating between my teeth because grit
and chalk dust in the air...

JUDITH HERZBERG – *Songs of Lament*

~ 8 ~