

Circle of Voices Discusses Linda Pastan October 11th 2023

A New Poet by Linda Pastan

Finding a new poet
is like finding a new wildflower
out in the woods. You don't see

its name in the flower books, and
nobody you tell believes
in its odd color or the way

its leaves grow in splayed rows
down the whole length of the page. In fact
the very page smells of spilled

red wine and the mustiness of the sea
on a foggy day; the odor of truth
and of lying.

And the words are so familiar,
so strangely new, words
you almost wrote yourself, if only

in your dreams there had been a pencil
or a pen or even a paintbrush,
if only there had been a flower.

Vermilion

Pierre Bonnard would enter
the museum with a tube of paint
in his pocket and a sable brush.
Then violating the sanctity
of one of his own frames
he'd add a stroke of vermilion
to the skin of a flower.
Just so I stopped you
at the door this morning
and licking my index finger, removed
an invisible crumb
from your vermilion mouth. As if
at the ritual moment of departure
I had to show you still belonged to me.
As if revision were
the purest form of love.

To a Daughter Leaving Home

When I taught you
at eight to ride
a bicycle, loping along
beside you
as you wobbled away
on two round wheels,
my own mouth rounding
in surprise when you pulled
ahead down the curved
path of the park,
I kept waiting
for the thud
of your crash as I
sprinted to catch up,
while you grew
smaller, more breakable
with distance,
pumping, pumping
for your life, screaming
with laughter,
the hair flapping
behind you like a
handkerchief waving
goodbye.

Why Are Your Poems So Dark?

Isn't the moon dark too,
most of the time?

And doesn't the white page
seem unfinished

without the dark stain
of alphabets?

When God demanded light,
he didn't banish darkness.

Instead he invented
ebony and crows

and that small mole
on your left cheekbone.

Or did you mean to ask
“Why are you sad so often?”

Ask the moon.
Ask what it has witnessed.

On Chanukah

Isn't fire itself
a miracle,
and didn't Prometheus pay
for giving it to us?

Think of a forest fire
blazing from tree
to tree in a dangerous
relay race
of flame.

Think of the safety
of campfires
licking at kindling, subsiding
into a jewel box of embers.

And now these candles

burning down
to stubs, but one more
lit each day, burning
and burning.

On the Steps of the Jefferson Memorial

We invent our gods
the way the Greeks did,
in our own image—but magnified.
Athena, the very mother of wisdom,
squabbled with Poseidon
like any human sibling
until their furious tempers
made the sea writhe.

Zeus wore a crown
of lightning bolts one minute,
a cloak of feathers the next,
as driven by earthly lust
he prepared to swoop
down on Leda.
Despite their power,
frailty ran through them

like the darker veins
in the marble of these temples
we call monuments.
Looking at Jefferson now,
I think of the language
he left for us to live by.
I think of the slave
in the kitchen downstairs.