



**Elisabeth Weiss** – Five Poems

## **Lost Mother**

Beautiful one of long ago  
who knelt with us when the house filled  
with a veiled peace useless to resist,  
when we knew the smell of your dress  
in the folds of sleep, in and out  
of consciousness, a blurred coupling  
of hands when kissed.

Wherever you are, under tiled roofs  
I remember you and I remember loneliness  
under the chestnut tree  
as we all grew in its crooked shadow.  
I imagine you old  
around the eyes, looking bored,  
piling white papers in the kitchen  
as if you were there voluntarily.

We all know how it happens.  
The earth shatters some of us into tiny pieces  
and those who are left go into hiding.  
This is how I explain my mother.  
I know she tried to hold me,  
she meant to play with my children  
but she was distracted  
and packed that gracious smile, as if love  
was the one thing she refused to get caught in  
and any old housekeeper could take care of the rest.

## **He Skates**

He wields a mighty shovel  
a human Zamboni  
clearing the way  
for the slap of the hockey stick  
between palm and thumb  
turning circles  
he's turned since childhood  
on the same frozen waters.

The sharp cry of the cut blade  
governs ice and snow  
under stitched lace.  
He knows the depths  
to which frogs will return  
and the hollow music of each plain house.

From the window  
the moon croons a last time.  
Packed boxes rest  
at the threshold to his parent's room,  
door frame intact  
with penciled height chart.

There is his name, who he was  
above his brother and sisters  
and those two tiny ones, unwritten.  
They skate past, transparent and identical  
into the echo of the empty space  
where sun light pours for  
everyone who came before.

## **Heartland**

Imagine a child in Illinois  
running after a combine.  
How obliterated he is  
in the tall field of corn.

He knows how to husk.  
He came into this world  
towing his breath.

Now and again  
he thinks the sky is limitless  
as he lies among the red ants.

He's been told that grasshoppers  
found their way into the silo  
once and ate hills of grain. He believes it.

He's watched insects siphon  
his work; when he grew baby carrots  
in the Victory Garden they were chewed  
to shreds.

The soles of his shoes are two birds.  
In his hair, swirling petals and leaves.  
He puts a pack of cards in his spokes  
and rides to town by the river.

Past the washed out houses  
he becomes the wind in the thrasher  
the seed nestled in the slope of the valley  
the unfolded wings of the beginning of darkness,  
small sails rising inside us.

### **To Myself at Twenty-One**

You are not my daughter.  
You are not the bare  
twisted branches of the yew tree  
any longer.  
I do not have a daughter  
but if I had to call you,  
I would call you thus.  
A small canopy of worry  
crosses your forehead.  
Let me help you  
not make peace with the clamor  
of what you cannot find  
on the pier nor in the ringing wind  
which twists your sheets  
as you embark and disembark.  
Know too your coming and going  
will have no reason  
nor will the passage of time  
ease the small stings of apse venom  
you thought you so cleverly hid

on the windowsill in an apothecary jar.  
Don't come from your hiding place  
into the impossibly blue air.  
The drop is not precipitous  
so if we don't link the soft bracelets  
of our wrists to the undersides  
of what we cannot bear  
then we can't both surface  
nor drown, nor fall, my darling  
not my daughter, my anointed one.

### **The Four in Hand**

My father forgot how to tie a tie  
The knot, the double loop  
He kicked a soccer ball  
while the Hindenburg flew.

The knot, the double loop  
It's the Windsor or the four in hand  
While the Hindenburg flew  
a spark ignited leaking hydrogen.

It's the Windsor or the four in hand  
Tighten by sliding it up the narrow end  
A spark ignited leaking oxygen.  
He caught shrapnel as an infantryman.

Tighten by sliding it up the narrow end  
The tourniquet was in the first aid kit.  
He caught shrapnel as an infantryman  
below Verdun in a field at night.

The tourniquet was in the first aid kit.  
Take the wide side around the neck, tighten a bit.  
Below Verdun in a field at night  
he thought that was it

Take the wide side around the neck, tighten a bit  
The mind goes in and the mind goes out  
He thought that was it  
Sparks jump from the fabric to the frame.

The mind goes in and the mind goes out  
My father reads only headlines now  
Sparks jump from the fabric to the frame  
Nothing will ever be the same.

My father reads only headlines now  
A mushroom shaped flame bursts into bloom  
Nothing will ever be the same  
Adjust the narrow slide through the loop.

**Elisabeth Weiss** teaches writing and literature at Salem State University and North Shore Community College. She has taught poetry in preschools, prisons and nursing homes as well as to the intellectually disabled. She has worked at Harper & Row Junior Books in New York and has an MFA from The University of Iowa Writer's Workshop. Elisabeth has published poems in London's *Poetry Review*, *Porch*, *Crazyhorse*, *Ibbetson Street Review* and has poems forthcoming in the *Birmingham Poetry Review* and the *Paterson Literary Review*. A chapbook, *The Caretaker's Lament*, will be published in 2016.