

Lisa Grunberger

Dreaming of Exile

1. Light

I love the afternoon light in my parents' bed-room, now mine.
Not only because it's an unusual shade of yellow, as it comes off the Bay
through the old lace curtains. Because I only saw it on special days

the light would come, a guest with a straw hat
and a basket of raspberries. We'd lie there and smell the light
mingle with the baking apples, sugar-cinammon light, apple light.

Slip the toothpick into the center of the cake. It has to be done with great delicacy
so as not to leave a hole. I am a surgeon. This dough, only moments ago pressed
with our own hands atop the apples, had become a hilly sandscape.

2. Order

An ex-lover used to say if you clean up the space around you, your mind will become clearer
and you'd find you would write more. Comments like these always inspired the deadpan in
me. I said "if there were a connection between order and creativity the suburbs would be the
new Greenwich Village, a bastion of creative eruption."

3. Space

Last night, snow. I come home past midnight and begin to shovel the driveway.
The sound of the shovel against the cement made a scratchy music.
My body dancing with my Father's old shovel.

I set the shovel beside the black garbage bag.
I wish I had a camera.
The snow still melts.

4. Embrace

Sometimes when I pull into the drive way and the house is still there, painted peach over the
old teal blue, I want to run up to it and hug it, to lay my cheek against its bricks and shingles
like a lover. To spread my arms out as wide as they'll go and take it all inside me, all inside me.
To imprint it on my body, in my body.

5. Director

Both my parents died inside this house, in the bed-room, in my arms. Sometimes I think if
I moved it (and here I see myself as a director) -- they'd return. "Yes, guys, one, two, three -

LIFT!” I can hear the tearing, like lifting a jumbo band-aid off an open wound. And plop it goes to East 9th Street. Parents enter stage left. “They look like immigrants. Make-up! Make-up! Jeez. Fix them up. They look like they’ve been through hell.”

6. Voice

You see, I’m pregnant with them.
They loved me into being.
I house them in their own music.

Star’s music. I am a ventriloquist
and a dummy. Who’s lap will you sit on tonight?
Whose voice will you throw?

Into whose body
will you breathe life?

8. Breath

By night-fall, my strings are tired.
I have remembered much, moved the pieces around, directed, danced, shovelled, prayed.
Time to sleep in the bed they died in.

I know the music of this house, the way a Mother knows her child’s cry.
Its croaks and moans, heat gurgling through the pipe’s veins, refrigerator buzz.
But I’ve never heard my own breath as I sleep, as a part of this symphony.

Tonight I shall record it.
It will change everything.
Trust me.

9. Morning

In the morning I discover my breath sounds like light. Apples bubbling beneath a sandy crust
pressed with mine and my Mother’s hands. My breath shaped by hands.

I sit at the kitchen table drinking coffee, eating raspberries. I listen to my recorded breath, like
seeing yourself in a mirror for the first time. Like wind. Like life. It is good.

I rewind the tape. I begin again. “Burn this, burn this.” I cross myself. I’ve left and returned
a thousand times. “Move this house, this life. Hiss, hiss, hiss. Leave this. Burn this.”

10. Name

I rewind the tape. Begin again. This time I feel her quick, efficient fingers pressing into me,
kneading me, shaping me.

I name the breath Apple.
It is my secret.

11. Secret

In the next moment, the next breath, I imagine, with whom I will share it, how will I move it, uproot this secret, spread it like jam onto the body, the bread of someone else's breath?

Into which lover's sea-shelled ear will I whisper? Which one will I lie in bed with on one of those delicious afternoons, to witness the light pouring through the curtains? To whom will I tell my story, the story of the burning house? The story of the apple breath, that kills and creates with one brush-stroke, one shovel-dig, always one toothpick away from crumbling.