

Andrew Szilvasy

The Dog in This is You

after a Grimm fairy tale

Out in the country skirts, a dove, a mouse
and a sausage lived together in one mess.
From dawn-lit hills steeped with Gondwanan stone,
Mouse fetched the waters of the Helicon.
Dove gathered tinder, clasped one in close claws —
beak fraying the dry skin of a twig to toss
into the heap soon hot under their pot.
Beside this, Sausage cut the veggies brought
in from their garden plot. They lived for years
like this, till one night Sausage disappeared.

They searched, our Mouse and Dove, in every birch
and every church. They wailed out a dirge,
and loud it shook some leaves. Then came down running —
Hair matted, teeth-hungry, sausage-mad, gums
bleeding for food — the dog that ate our friend.
O, to think poor young Sausage so condemned
to the bile! they scurried up and grabbed Dog's paws.
Some words were had. He spoke without remorse:
"Sausages aren't alive. Nor can mice nor birds
nor dogs speak." Indeed: there are no such woods.

At this retort old sock of a mouse lay damp
and our lovely Dove once more was damned
again (a trashed napkin), and Dog? A grime-
brown blanket draped on a ragged recliner.

Two Roads

Yesterday we spent at least an hour
scouring the internet for shawarma.
This place was closed, and that one had no beer.
Defeated, we found a Greek place with some charm.

I had a gyro like I always do.
For you, keftedes with a pita plate.
And then so quickly the sky went white, pursued
by whatever it is that makes the deep blue sweat.

Windows weeping, we hung inside. You reminded
me of skipping school, slinking down sidewalks
to the park then peeling off our rain-drenched rinds
and devising lies to excuse our soaking socks.

A different story might take the “two roads” moral,
noting that our day was likely as fun
as the wanted one. But maxims are a chore
to you, so you got to work right home from lunch.

I won't lie to you: the interruptions
drove me crazy. *How much turmeric is
too much?* I had no idea, I was trashing
my translation of *e scolorocci il viso*.

Morning you went off for tahini while I — poor cook
that I am — spent twice as much time chopping mint
as I should've, and took forever to find the smoked
paprika. I just wanted to read my Dante.

But now that cumin, cinnamon, and pepper
have colonized my nostrils, all I want to do
is taste this surprise afternoon of myrrh,
longed-for shawarma, some red wine, and you.

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Epistle

To Brett, on the Death of his Mother

You know, old friend, this moment stands too large
for speech, plus I don't have the gear for dirge:
it's happiness or philosophical
reflections free from much emotional
heft always, and I'm many miles away,
at that, writing from a Jordaan café.
And there can be no real condolences
when one's mother walks among the shades:
it's ancient water smashing at chalk cliffs
that tear not just the rock but also rip
the very breath out of our throats. You sense
Poseidon has been slighted by offenses
you inadvertently made, and now he crafts
bronze cruelties, pours into their hollow casts—

But it's just silence. Leaves fall off the trees
even when the air is still. It feels
like only Everest stands unburied but
we know that too will be filed down to dust.
Our life is dew and this world's core is fire
coolly boiling off what we admire.

I wish that I could offer you my prayers
but they'd mean nothing to the man upstairs
after all my years of benign negligence.
But let me offer you these few words without the pretense
they carry with them metaphysical
comfort or anything too mystical.

So look, you never do get over it,
though after time forced smiles you counterfeit
for others morph into rough facsimiles
of happiness, and then eventually
you're back, more or less, as Hemingway
would say, stronger in these broken places.
You can't unsee your wasted mother lying
a monument to ephemerality
inside a box you didn't know she bought:
that sight will never really leave your thoughts,

but in this moment shines more brightly than
all other memories, as if the sun
exploded in your mind and littered it
with light down to your reptile brain's gill-slits:
so thoroughly death colors everything.

Yet when it dims
there's space for all those background stars to trim
the newly darkened sky, although their light
will always have a melancholy tint.
It's like how snow-topped mountains bring a coolness
despite their peaks residing in the distance.

Though I'm an atheist, Qohelet
brought me some solace: sun rising and sun setting,
all that. And Matthew, too: the Father "sendeth
rain on the just and on the unjust." Sound
sense, though that fatalism only works
in even hours. At odd hours I was sure
crickets deserved blame
whenever darkness came.

Regardless, I hope you find at least a spoonful
of what meager comfort's possible.

If you were over here as planned,
I'd buy you a drink. The offer stands
when I get back to your neck of town.
Drinks are all I'm good for, as you know.