

Nina Rubinstein Alonso – Three Poems

Light Bag Heavy Bag

Light bag heavy bag rickety rackety
chain swings back and forth when
dad works out in the cellar thuds of
one-two punches clunk of dumbbells

thick steel bar with iron weights
learned to box to protect himself after
West End bullies beat up a blond Jewish boy
carrying Latin and science books

closed his drug store to swim at the Y
skipped lunch to bike or skate
once took me to the police firing range
to watch him take aim and hit target center

didn't help when thieves showed up with
guns demanding cash drugs cigarettes
as his pistol was hidden out of reach
maybe lucky as no shots were fired

left him shaky pale but breathing
still have the ring he won boxing
golden lion head roaring silently
at whatever beasts in the jungle.

My Brother Remembers

From forty five years ago
he remembers the phone number
of that office where he was a lawyer
keeps dialing over and over
from a nursing facility that's nobody's home

until they call to complain they can't

stand more calls so nurses take his phone
making him more upset than he was already
find ways to adjust technical bits and return
the phone 'fixed' so he can't call anyone
except his wife thirty six times a day

so many messages she turns off the ringer

to survive knowing he means no harm
just doesn't recall dialing or leaving messages
or much of anything plus he has nothing else
to do and needs to do something
but when I called last week

he remembered I was searching for

another theater to stage my ballet show asked
if I'd found one so I told him I'd located options
after months of searching but decided to go
back to the old place which can be awful
as the new options seemed even worse

so damnable dementia what in hell are you doing

sending ruinous forces that scramble mental
electricity rattle energetic cords in the brain
cutting threads until nothing remains but blank spots
of jagged misdirection forces spouting technical difficulties
except occasionally retaining beyond all logic and reason

the clarity and simplicity of perfect sense.

Brother /Sister

In uniform he's a tall young warrior
sarcastic smart ass playing baseball
in Hawaii with the Marine All Stars

pocketing poker money for college
laughing at me his arty sister
questioning my quickie wedding

shaking his head at my shocker divorce
'told you so-- you're doing what?
going to India again?'

convinced he's doing the right thing
his house and two kids
the nice wife the big cars

I stop trying to explain
give up wanting him
to see my side

hear that he'll never hear me
understand he can't understand
and when he says 'stay strong'

it means I should be like him
change myself though life is heavy
on him depressed swallowing new meds

while he still paints me the romantic fool
chasing fantasies--true enough--
but neither of us lets go

so our argument has no end
I hang on to him-- he hangs on to me--
brother/sister/battle/love.

Nina Rubinstein Alonso's work appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Ploughshares*, *Ibbetson Street*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Peacock Journal*, etc. Her book *This Body* was published by David Godine Press, her chapbook *Riot Wake* is upcoming from Cervena Barva Press. A novel, story collection and sequence of poems about travels in Spain are in the works.