

Steve Klepetar



Feature

A Piece of Advice

Bier auf Wein, das lasse sein. Wein auf Bier, das rat ich dir.
That was my father's advice, freely given, always well meant:
"Beer after wine, that shouldn't be done.
Wine after beer, that's fine, my son," in my loose translation.
He also said "When the father gives to his son, both laugh.
When the son gives to his father, both cry."
He was a regular fortune cookie, my father.
But since he was from Prague, he didn't teach me how
to hit a baseball or throw a spiral.
He'd come to my games, read the Times,
until it was my turn to bat, then he'd look up, bemused.
He told me about Achilles, though, and when I asked why
Thetis didn't flip him over, dip in in the river Styx again
he looked at me for a long moment with that faint smile.
"One dip to a customer, boychick."
He gave me some slivovitz once, a shot glass full,
and laughed when I zoomed backward and crashed into the wall.
He neglected to tell me what you were supposed to drink
after slivovitz, but for days my mouth tasted like the burning city of Troy.

This is the room

where you spent the last three months
looking out at the world through a rectangle
of glass, where the white tablecloth
scattered sunlight in the afternoon.
This is the room where rain fell and fell
as wind blew dead leaves all around,

where your mother came on her tiny feet
to offer you cake,
the room where you read for hours
about a world where time flowed backwards
and the rich lived in houses in the sky.
This is the room where you napped
in the blue chair and woke groggy and ashamed,
where time stopped, where you disappeared
into paintings on the wall, and clawed at the notes
of a madrigal when the lights switched off.
This is the room where you tried to live
a good life, half-blind hermit hidden in a soundless land.

Lost Lake

Could this be the road to Lost Lake,
where the river disappeared as heat rose?
Last night you spoke with two old friends,
drank and laughed, as hard rain hissed
against glass. You pulled the shades.
Maybe it's the road paved with skulls.
You step lightly here, as if in a dream,
with an owl rustling in the dark trees.
Maybe it's the road your father took,
but fog makes it hard to see, hard to say.
Is that your skin on the bushes there,
your mouth hanging from a rusted hook?
Maybe it's the road to the cave of flame
where you burn to rise in the moonlit glade.

Only Child

“I was running across Lagos with my sister.
We were doing a marathon, and having
to push vagrants and street dogs out of our
way. But I have no sister; I'm an only child.”

Teju Cole, *Open City*

And there are dreams of cousins,
all those bodies risen from ash.

There are uncles and aunts
with their thick ankles,

all talking at once,
dumplings piled on the table,
potatoes and jellied carp, pot roast
in red gravy,
everyone laughing, arguing,
moving their hands as though
the air was water
and all of us swimming toward shore.

My cousins and I rush downstairs
in a pack, tumbling
off the landing, racing each other
to Georgette's for ice cream cones,
the seven cent special.
I am the youngest
and know the least about anything,
but they think I'm funny, and let me tag along.

I tell them about the bear we saw
last summer, a large male
that trudged so near our house
we could have hit him with a baseball
if we dared.
"How do you know he was male?"
my cousin Magda asks.
"He was wearing a Yankees shirt," I say
and "reading *Playboy*." The cousins crack up.
Magda ruffles my hair. Streetlights glow
and beyond the hills the sky is drizzled with stars..

How to Open Doors

Venture out
into the moonlight,
or if it's raining,
find a streetlamp.
Cross your fingers
behind your back
and say the name
of someone you love,
not a child
or an old person,
a lover whose flesh
you crave.

Smile and whisper
the name three times.
The door will open

when you bang
with your naked fist.
If this fails,
repeat each step,
but this time
try wearing gloves
and don't be so naïve.
Some doors are locked
and meant to stay that way.

Steve Klepetar lives in the Berkshires in Massachusetts. He is the author of fourteen poetry collections, including *Family Reunion*, which is available from Big Table Publishing; *The Li Bo Poems* and *My Son Writes a Report on the Warsaw Ghetto*.