

A GIRL GOES INTO THE WOODS

Selected Poems

Lyn Lifshin

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APRIL, PARIS

Nothing would be less shall we call it what it is, a cliché than April in Paris. But this poem got started with something I don't think I could do but it reminded me of Aprils and then three magazines came with Paris on the cover. Sometimes I'm amazed at all the places I'm not, let's say Paris since actually it's only March but in the magazines they are at outdoor cafes which must be quite chilly now. And I forgot the cigarette smoke, until I see many in the photographs are holding what I'm sure isn't a pen. I wondered how they can always be eating, biting and licking something sweet and still have the most gorgeous bodies. I wonder too how my friend, once an actress, so maybe that's a clue, could dress up in scanty, naughty, as she puts it clothes for her husband while I am sitting here in baggy jeans and torn sweatshirts. I'm wondering if it's because he's lost his job and she is trying to cheer him up. I began thinking of Paris when she described the umbrella she decorated with drops of rain, how she just wore a garter belt under it. I thought of tear-shaped drops of rain I made for the Junior Prom's *April in Paris*, long before I felt the wind thru my hair on Pont Neuf. It's there in the photograph which I hope is more original than the idea of the photograph because I plan to use it on my next book. I wish I could feel what she must, dolled up, trying to soothe this man and getting off on it. As for me, only imagining you, the one with fingers on me, holding me on the page of a book could make me as excited

HERE IN VIRGINIA, THE MAGNOLIAS ARE ALREADY LOSING THEIR COLOR. OR, THE UN-AFFAIR

Even so, there was collateral damage.
Paris was a diversion, yes.
The last night in Austin we drove and talked
till 3 a.m. in mist.
I would have named that night
the last chance motel

Paris was a diversion, yes.
It wasn't the first time with someone who
cared, mourning another.
Other bad news dogged me those weeks of rain

It wasn't the first time with someone who
cared more for me while I longed
for another.
Sunset from Pont Neuf would have made me
ache more if it hadn't been raining

Could it have been so long ago I was
here with my husband?
It would not be the only time
dying for one tortured man or another,
writers so tortured they could only torture

Longing seems so much more intense
than skin on skin.
Wine helped and the beautiful Parisian girls
with tight asses. Everyone was kissing in
the street. In Austin in thick heat the almost-a-lover
only grazed my lips with lips dry and cold

BLUE AT THE TABLE IN THE HOT SUN

give him a shot of light,
give him ragged glass
to escape thru,
black cat blues dogging
the bed

He, OK, it's you, hell-bound,
in a hurry. You're pulling blue
out of the strings. Mama's got

a brand new. It's the table
in the light. Cat on the chair
with night scratching

Wind rattles the panes,
rattles gone love thru your
spine. Your baby's
changed the lock on the door

If you're still singing,
earth fills your lips

I LIFT MY MOTHER TO THE COMMODORE

almost too late tho
it's as close to the bed
as the tub to the
toilet lid I kept her
company on, handing
her soap and towels.
My mother, who could
climb Beacon Hill in
5-inch heels at 70,
can't lift herself with-
out my arms, my hands,
always too cold she
shivers. "If I just was
not so lazy," she sighs,
which translates, "Tired,
weak." The hospital bed
could be Everest. Our
awkward dance to lift
her hopeless as prayers
for mercy, a reprieve,
but I try to not show my
fear and now see her
tremble as the doorbell
rings. Verizon, to install
a private line she'll be
alive less than a week to
use. Still on the commode,
my stranded mother is
lifted by this smiling man
as if it was part of every
day's phone service,
gently as if carrying a
bride over the threshold
for a new life