

V.B. Price

ORACLE NEWS

Christmas 2005

ARCHAIC TORSO OF APOLLO

Rainer Maria Rilke

*We cannot know his legendary head
with eyes like ripening fruit. And yet his torso
is still suffused with brilliance from inside,
Like a lamp, in which his gaze, now turned low,*

*gleams in all its power. Otherwise,
the curved breast could not dazzle you so, nor could
a smile run through the placid hips and thighs
to that dark center where procreation flared.*

*Otherwise this stone would seem defaced
beneath the translucent cascade of the shoulders
and would not glisten like a wild beast's fur:*

*would not, from all the borders of itself,
burst like a star: for here there is no place
that does not see you. You must change your life.*

Translated by Stephen Mitt

The Oracle wasn't
all washed up at all.
But hope
is a real tough calling.

She used to knit scarves
to make her points,
warm with bromides, formerly wise,
still true:

*Know Thy Self
Moderation Wins
You Must Change Your Life
The Readiness Is All*

Few read them.

So she took to speaking
like so much graffiti:

*God Is Home Sweet Home,
she scribbled on boxcars along the way.*

Then she made up some Christmas weather
out of the words of any old poet who came along.
One, denser than most, she heard pleading,
How *do* I change my life?
Is it true you can make
small adjustments
and everything falls into place,
like curing a limp
by good posture alone.
Is that right?

*Don't worry about what's right,
she scrawled on fence posts.
It will come to you as strange advice.*

It's not your fears
that matter, is it, the poet blurted.
not those over-excavated,
looted digs, the archaeology of our terrors,
not the birdy flu,
the terrorists, and hurricanes,
cancers, tortures, humiliations, ice caps
melting, poison gas, white phosphoreus,
vanishing oil, soiled water, war,
not the demons of insult and disregard,
the horror gods of paranoia?

No. Why change?, she sprayed on bridges.

What matters is doing good,
for goodness sake. Isn't it? ,
the poet wrote on his hand with a ball point pen.

Let's not be lured
by the dope
of posthumous glory,
your whole life reduced
to merely the sound of your name.

*A joying we will go,
a joying we will go,
she painted on railroad ties in Laramie, Wyoming.*

Think of the relief you feel
if you could just stop
the drip, drip, drip
of cavernous complaint,
the inner whine, the low grade fever
of sweaty carping, the gobbling,
eternal, dead-end critique, ragged
like the buzz of sirens in your ears,
the bells of St Tintinnus stilled.

*Ho, ho, ho,
a joying we will go,
hi ho the happy o,
she scratched in fresh cement.*

The oracle could feel her audience
turning away, straining to hear

the sweet, low wail of the damners,
and damned reformers and their giddy harps.

“How do I change my life?” the old poet pleaded.

*Ho, ho, ho,
a joying we will go;
I told you so, I told you so,
a joying sweet and slow,
she doodled in Missoula*

Is that it?,
the old poet scolded.
What about resentments,
cleaning them out
like blowing your nose
of night's debris,
that first release,
the oily dust of hurt,
incapacity, betrayal
sneezed up the chimney
with a “Happy Trails!”

*Is that you, Santa Claus?
she penned on casts and braces all over the world.*

*Think of the fondest
dreams of ice.
Now there's some strange advice,
she quipped on the sands of Waikiki.*

When ego is replaced,
when acquiescence is erased ,
what is
works out
into what
will be,
without
using you
as manure,
the old poet doodled as if in a duel.

*Dashing through the snow
knowing what you know,
hope is free to grow and grow
when it lets you go,
she scribbled on bags of cat food.*

*A joying we will go,
a joying we will go,
good's in sight
and life is right
there's nothing more to know,
she whispered into nurseries.*

Rosa Parks,
now there's a hero.

*Your mind's not to blame.
It wanders. Learn to ride it,
she iced on scones in Nova Scotia..*

But why is mind:
mind what I say,

and I don't mind,
and never mind?

Paths exist, like mice trails
through the scrub and snow.

Don't find out what it's like
to be old without being wise.

Take the numinous where you find it,
she wrote on the soles of sneakers.

We can't be told,
but we know
that worry
has added
nothing
to nothing,
to nothing!

Be at home in happiness.
she jotted on the windshields of a billion cars.

Protect only
your openness.

*Can you tell
joy from success,
freedom from rebellion,
happiness from getting what you want?,*
she chalked over playgrounds.

What's bliss?
she wrote on the clouds.

The supreme,
sweet, kindness
of choice,
and the miracle
of the chance
that it matters.

Knowing nothing
is wrong
in world that is
what it is
what it is
what it is
what it is.

*Take sides,
Choose joy,*
the Oracle sighed across the windows of the world.

*You must change your life.
Don't find out what it's like
to be old without being wise.*

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THANKS
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