

Two Poems

Sophia Galifianakis

Symptoms

Today again, my mother tells a story she can't tell: a niece,
a daughter's friend, a nameless touch, a glare, melded

like a dream she wasn't sure she'd slept in.

Three hours or three days. She laughed at me—

didn't I know they were the same. People

out of nowhere run before her. They steal her favorite sheets. Every day

we search for bits of reality. Sometimes

it clings sideways from a shirtsleeve in a closet

full of things she's forgotten how to hang. Bundles

of keys and golden crosses, secrets

wrapped in tissue, pictures, beauty

captured in a Ziploc bag she keeps beside her

always ends up missing. At night she lies in bed with her lights on
at night she folds and unfolds her clothes
at night she walks the halls chattering

ancient rites. Cassandra and her chorus before the ravaged prophecies
she knows will soon destroy her.

Who wouldn't go mad, so tragically knowing.

At the doctor's office, she shrinks
and wrinkles in her seat, twists
a tissue to hold back tears
at the mention of a biopsy—

the lining of her temporal arteries possibly inflamed,
an explanation for her strangled vision and throbbing
headaches. *No, just local anesthesia.*

You won't feel a thing.

My mother rocks herself, to nurse
the childhood of war she now recalls, the dead

like planks beneath her feet, the curse of clarity.

The Lantern

near the barracks, by the main gate

there stands a lantern, still in wait

from *Lili Marlen*, A popular song among WWII German soldiers

At the oven door's opening, *Don't touch,*

my mother warns

you'll get burnt!

I never touch

but listen to the story of scars

embroidered on her palms

that pat and baste the air she commands—

Come come. Taste. Isn't it delicious! It is.

So hot, sweet. As a girl

she was kidnapped by a Nazi because

she looked like his own. Fair girl,

seemed so eager to learn

songs in a language she didn't understand. Imagine

the chocolates

he stuffed in her pockets as she sang and walked on dead bodies

all the way home: a father,

a cousin. Who knows

how melody melts on a girl's tongue who

waited like a lantern by the barrack door—

Vor der Kaserne vor dem grossen Tor

Stand eine Laterne, und steht noch davor

you know, the story goes. Songs

are the mind's oil. Measure

They killed

most of the men and boys

and verse

but they were the kinder ones to absorb

the heat. *Don't touch!*

The British were there to help us.

Ach! They hid their food—

wouldn't give us a crumb.

The German who kidnapped you,

did he kill your father?

We had to watch. And she sings

to the phantoms that have come to her

after so long, to take her chocolate songs

and the light where she stands

all night by the oven door.

Sophia Galifianakis teaches at the University of Michigan, where she received her MFA in poetry. Her poems have appeared in *Plume*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Arts & Letters*, *The Greensboro Review*, and other journals.