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The Girls of My Youth

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The girls of my youth, nausicaas
The girls of my youth, dianas, danaias, lolitas
they are only in their forties, but they are already gray haired, creased foreheads, wrinkled hands
those “ladylike ones behind the sewing machines”
Many of them are already toughened, have already forgotten love
as a foreign language is forgotten.

The girls of my youth, ruths and sulamkas
The girls of my youth, sea fairies
have large and empty eyes
All of their tears they have depleted
But they were as if created for adultery, sisters of esther and judith

All of their adulteries they spent
in bomb shelters, in basements, in lines for bread
all of their sinful thoughts they bestowed upon the dead
Sometimes in passing they smile at me
but more with care, like a mother to a foolish child
When, during coffee, I mention missed opportunities
they say: you left, and you still feel up to it. You don’t know how it is
to be numb to everything
When winter gives birth to its child

Their heavy hair I sometimes ruffle in dreams
Their proud behinds I touch with the rustle of silk
Their small breasts I gently cover with palms
and I think: by god, in ten years they will all be dead

Quickly will die these goddesses of my youth
crushed by war, hunger and tears
those penelopes without suitors, brides with extinguished smiles
Those inaccessible secret wells of pleasure of long ago
those antigones that evoke emptiness, emptiness without hope
emptiness without echo

Translated by Sara Elaqad – © 2007 Sara Elaqad

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