

## Birth

A woman's bones go out of joint in labour.  
...she ought to rest for forty days and nights,  
tradition prescribes.

The regular drudge – my mother,  
house-proud and limefaced, obeyed.

Forty dawns after I started to suckle  
and my strangled twin brother began to rot,  
a still born wind was respirated and swept over the Balkans,  
caressing summer heat like a foreign lover,  
coiling around sweaty necks of peasants wrapped  
in whirls of chaotic hay, and factory workers  
peering through small, fatty windows on their short breaks.

It was a cold one that glided down  
the Slovenian tripod peaks  
Triglav,

then drifting drifting drifting  
    along the short border to Italy,  
        it nudged the Croatian Mediterranean  
            taking a waft of pine  
    then eddied over the range  
of mountains into my motherland,  
where it cruised around,  
unable to settle down  
    in any one place,  
        or continue  
    southward into  
        Macedonia or  
eastward over Serbia  
    into Europe, Asia,  
        and exotic countries  
            of the world.

Forty nights after my first drop of milk,  
mother of all rainbows a-bridged the town,  
and set an epileptic old woman,  
with her face all burnt  
arunning under it, in belief  
she would become  
a man.

She came to our house, her knocking  
on the heavy door made me let go of the nipple.

The rainbow woman took me to her bosom  
and caressed with her warm breath smelling of plums,  
cinnamon and burnt bread,  
all the while trying not to look at me

too long.

Then she hit the concrete floor and left me  
with a memento on my right brow,  
left me pregnant with lore.

## **Rainbow Child**

Rainbow child was born colour blind  
and ambidextrous.

She grew to appreciate the greyness of  
winter, on another scale,  
and would never get

scarred  
by blood in the

wounded women's vomit,

or by the jelly fluid she'd  
pummel out of their bellies,  
after she wrapped their babies tight.

Rainbow woman grew

old

epileptic

and face burnt.

## **A Song to Be.**

The nun's gaze was reverently  
glued to the shimmering sky and  
her chin almost dropped down.

'This translucent bridge doesn't lead  
to the city of gods,' she whispered.

Her thoughts drifted to  
the city under the rainbow,  
pregnant with the oblivion  
of another no-less-violent time.

The city now pregnant with war.  
whose slopes were curved like a bud,

opening at the first touch of light,  
and the muezzin call.

Her feet sank into the fast growing mud  
and her calves itched to the bones,  
when she stumbled out of the forest  
and inched down to the valley.

There was something in this pilgrimage  
to unrecognised land and this walking down the slope  
that more and more, for every footstep she left  
in the moist ground, bound her to some secret chant,

the unsung rhythm of  
a song-to-be.

## **Power Cut**

Those powerless days,  
when we had run out of furniture,  
father made us read  
every page,  
before we burnt the books.

Those warm  
war days.

## **Thus Spake the One Who Lost Jealousy**

O ye jealous ones,  
clambering your pride like mountains,  
many bitter kisses ye give,

give,  
yet take more thereof.

This I sayeth upon ye pompous ones, for  
I lost my jealousy  
...after the first rape in a row.

Now I am a forehead on a grimy window,  
an astonished silhouette  
flickering, slowly flickering against  
blurred background of cracked walls,  
broken fans and  
buzzing bulbs.

I admit, I was green-eyed,  
envious and invidious,

even of those who got  
hanged,  
rented out,  
loaned out,  
bought up,  
brought back,  
stored up,  
mortgaged,  
won, stolen, or seized.

Now for jealousy I want weight,  
a heart of the insect  
whose wings would sizzle  
stroking against tempting, unadorned, undivided

shine.

For intimacy I want a touch of burnt air,  
a seductive sight of a broken-glass-face.

O ye jealous ones,  
sliding down your solid slopes,  
relentless bloody kisses ye give,  
take,  
give,  
and give more thereof.

## **Twin Moons**

It is dangerous, to look  
too long at twin sickles.

Almasa looks down at the clear-faced earth,  
through a wood of Christmas trees,  
glistening in the splitting light.

Tired bus driver miraculously misses both  
broad-shouldered sentinels: dirty, yellow and abandoned  
barracks of the Uddevalla refugee camp.

Above, two crescent moons are rising...  
in the naked twilight and the haze  
from her breath coats the window.

Once more and perhaps for the last time,  
she draws her father's face with her thumb.

His pupils are thin and sharp new moons.

She puckers her lips,  
kisses the forehead  
...giving it a third eye.

It is way too dangerous to peer  
through twin, crescent moons.

## Tidings

Someone, a doctor, probably a nurse,  
told Almasa she was pregnant,  
and she did not think it was a cliché.

## Nurse, Be Gentle

Nurse, be gentle, I thought.  
The nurse said, 'It takes seven seconds...'

It takes seven seconds, she said,  
twice tapped the needle,  
trussed my legs with her knees.  
My swollen vein enveloped the steel,  
A drop of me slithered out into the syringe.

...three four fiv...

Next morning, when the nurse was gone,  
I woke up with an empty stomach,  
on a bus rife with rumour.

## She the Mad

At night, through a lukewarm wind,  
she is carried by a sizzling sense,  
over the limits of Persian ways,

She the mad, she the senseless.

Then fate makes her cringe, yet at nobody's feet.  
She scoops herself up with her bowled palms.  
scoops herself out of the bunker of trust.

At night, she strokes a small canvas, already framed,  
with a brush doused in the nuance of a dark shining sky.

Her lips clasp in awe of the black stains  
upon vanishing blank.

Blankness brimming,  
frantically gasping

at the dark edges,  
sucking, inhaling invisible ink of air,  
covering itself, covering its naked kingdom with colourless tints,  
words painted,  
words written,  
sensual things that make no sense.

Tints of words.

A seductive wish makes her drop the brush:  
If only for a crack of time  
she could die the way she was born,

She the mad she the forlorn...

maybe longing would cancel out,  
and forgetting,  
and forgiveness  
would dawn on her with the sunrise,  
intruding through the clean lines of a portrait  
once before fingered on a grimy window.

## Name

Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and  
realize I'm making love with him.  
His sighs rustle like autumn leaves,  
his black skin is hairless and his palms gentle.  
I contract as I wake up,  
he twitches and moans.

He knows this was kindled in a dream.  
It always is.

I'm wet inside out, it must have been a good dream  
I was sleeping with.  
If it was a bad one forcing itself on me,  
then this man has saved me,  
brought me elsewhere, into the mirror image of  
a modern ritual.

Once he told me I just take his hand, slip it inside my knickers,  
not calling his name, not trying to wake him up,  
not kissing and whispering.  
Foreplay takes place before it makes itself known.

I sit on him, light as my warm silhouette  
on the wall opposite the crescent moon window.  
I wait till he grows limp, till his eyes can no longer  
watch the darkness and he falls asleep.  
Then, only then I pull myself up from the slack penis,  
leave it wet and pregnant with my smell.

A trickle of lukewarm blood runs down my thigh,  
but it stops just above my knee and dries up.  
It always does. A perpetual loss.

I see I still have my negligee on, tight like my own skin.  
The draught from the kitchen shuffles through  
my black notebook, over my hand and my red pencil.  
I cannot tell the pages from the cool air.  
It does not matter. I know they're blank.

The pen forces me to write down a name, my own name  
ordering me, Sleep Almasa. You need to sleep.  
You need a place where you will not remember  
your need to dream.

I caress the scar under my chin, the one I got from my lover  
when I gave him tenfold more: cuts that heal our real gushes.  
He is dead, like my refugee lives, like my short-time homes,  
dead like my first foreign refuge.  
It's been years since I killed him.

I press the tip against the paper; it sinks deep and  
sticks in this self-made hole. Then the ink seeps out and  
makes it wet before the voice comes back, Almasa.  
Don't steal from memory, Almasa.

I throw the pen into the toilet, then take it up  
and put in between the blank sheets.  
The paper sucks it dry.  
I open the book, write my name on a dry blotch,  
then I crawl back next to my lover,  
take his hand and slip it in my pants.

## Full Circle

In the days following her disappearance,  
something started to smell nice  
in the heart of the Balkans, on a hedge  
in the wavering no-man's-land, lush and colourful.

A house and a quince tree were keeping vigil there,  
as if put in the place for reasons claimed, shouted  
and forgotten at the same time.

It was hot, my natural weather.  
The time of Hawaiian shirts and  
jeans cut just below the knees was back,  
like the last trace of a fashion  
that had screamed to its death some time ago.

I had an imp on my shoulders, laughing at everything,  
even at the finger I put to his red nose.  
He laughed when he farted on my neck,

holding tight to the scruff of my head  
as he would to a horse's mane, not to be tossed off.

I took him down and rolled in the grass,  
tickled him and ruffled his blond, curly hair.  
Then I went straight for the quince,  
reached up with my right hand.

A bite.

I pulled the empty hand back,  
and thrust the fist into the bark  
to tear the wounded flesh off,  
to dislodge the whole thing from the shoulder,  
and throw it away.

I kneeled and the boy ran to me  
tousled my hair, pulled my ears,  
and flicked me in my drowsy head  
that fell hard against the ground.

As if it hit the little plastic button  
that set a forgotten vinyl record revolving,  
and let a brittle yet warm sound of a poet  
run like the water from a thawing icicle:

Though lovers be lost, death shall not,  
And love shall have no dominion.

When the perfect scenario of my own demise  
ceased to reverberate in my mind, I did not shudder.  
The world appeared warless again,  
the countryside no longer threatening and un-homely.  
I looked up smiling at the sentinel boy  
who was pulling faces at me.

I heard a mother cry out a name and the boy  
disappeared behind the corner, into her embrace.  
She leaned down with a bag of cucumbers,  
and stretched her fingers till blood rushed back  
to the pale marks in her palms.

I sought her eyes, watching me,  
returning the courtesy of a gaze and grabbed  
the metal leg of a bench in the middle of a teeming bazaar,  
inhaling a breath of the good old smell of dust  
and the first drops of rain on the booths  
and the tired heads behind them.

I gave her a big, warm smile, and she smiled back,  
saying, 'You look like a man in love.'  
I whispered, 'What else is there to be?'

## Homecoming

The heat of a summer night brewed  
camomile growth in my backyard  
when I left my country.

Winter Sweden whetted my nose hair  
with the smells of baked bread,  
saffron buns and cinnamon pastry.

Fifteen years later I enter my old house,  
the fumes grip my tongue  
and make words clammy.

Everything feels real like a good  
steady dream, a dream that does not  
leave you when you wake up.

The neighbourhood is almost pickled except for  
unrecognisable faces framed in familiar windows.  
It is nice and ghostly to be there again.

I caress the cold stove to which I was strapped,  
my eyes bulging at the short queue of  
soldiers and civilians, not more than five of them.

I gave up screeching after the third.

I admire the stamina of men,

posing for foreign photographers  
from behind a fence, and somehow  
with their thirsty clammy lips  
smacking a word in a foreign,  
recognisable tongue, fresh and crisp  
like your mother's breath—"help".

My old bedroom is empty, once again.  
I wonder if they took all our furniture with them  
or burned the lot.

I wonder how they survived winter without us and  
why they left hooks welded to the curtain holders,  
with smoked-meet rests all scorched and salt-white.

Back in Sweden, the Persian grocers has baked  
ten kinds of fummy bread, raisin buns, Danish pastry,  
baklava and American doughnuts.

I was not gone a month and already  
he has renamed his store into  
"There's no place like home".

## You Told My Mother She Was a Bitch

You told my mother she was a bitch,  
Over a cold dinner dish.  
You dared her to cry and screech.

'Stop whinin' you bleedin' witch!  
As a beast on a leash,  
You spat my mum like a crying bitch.

Oh you damn stinking flitch.  
You rubbed her face with salty fish,  
And made her cry and screech.

Then put your palm on her neck, a hitch.  
She swivelled her eyes, divulged a wish.  
You told my mother she was a bitch.

I took a bat and served you a pitch.  
Now you were a cold fish.  
You wrenched her to cry and screech.

Behind the bars I cannot breach  
The line of silence of a granted wish.  
You told my mother she was a bitch,  
You dared her to cry and screech.

## Seven Seconds

Seven summers have passed  
Since I went to the desert, to a doorless house.

Still and suspended I would stand by any of the  
Seven windows all broken down, seeing only

Serrated edges of the scene outside, clean and sharp  
Securing me from attempting a bogus suicide.

Secluding the indoor air from  
Serene winds, and

Scrolls of wild weed rolling  
Safely over beggarly plains.

Seemingly bold inscriptions, too grow  
Sandy on the supine, sedentary sea of sand

Seven ages since, winterless yet not tame  
Seven seconds for you I only could spare,

Only seven I put away.

## Breathless

Mina lies in her parents' bed,  
sheeted up to her ears.  
She doesn't hear her mother snoring,  
nor the absent breath of her Dad.

Soaked in fever and dreaming of a bath,  
she almost giggles like an infant trickster,  
when she runs out and gasps for air  
down, down at the bank of Ister.

As she spins downstream, the lulling sky breezes  
warmer, then colder, warmer then colder,  
closing her wide marine eyes.

Then an unnamable boy finds her breathless,  
anchored in the swelling bank of the Ister.  
He almost kisses her, but her lips cut the fickle air  
as it slips slips slips, at every gasp.

And she lies in the riverbed,  
sanded up to her lips.  
She can hear her father whisper  
and her heavy breath pass pass pass.

Is this...

Is this the time to hate your wife  
and shirk your children?

Maybe this age of yours lies in the times  
when you dreamed of holding your sons  
sleeping on your chest and you...  
were not going anywhere.

Your hands are still stretched out  
not to greet but to add force  
to another jump  
into the mound of work you've been piling  
on yourself, like question upon question...like  
darkness upon darkness  
...in the cliché of a meaningful search.

Ask the devil under you hat  
if he's content early in the mornings after a long  
nightful of spirits,  
put him on your steel chair  
instead of your victims

flash him with the Gestapo light  
and see if he can contrive a smile,  
a genuine laugh with and not only at you?

Is this the time for deals,  
you wonder as you reach him  
a half full glass and cry,  
'Hej cheers man, for better and worse?

'Oh don't smash it,' he says.  
'Break it with your teeth.'

And you leer back thinking,  
Is there anything else to be sorry for?  
Some mischief left for  
repentance?  
Some wicked thought  
unthought?  
Some vileness left  
undone?

And he says, 'Is there time for anything?'

## **Every Remembering is a Lamentation**

I don't remember my mother  
beating me early in the evenings,  
late after lunch, just in time for  
breakfast sandwiches and cold chocolate.

I don't remember my father  
and my seven brothers going  
off to work without kissing me  
and calling me Snow White.

I don't remember pulling  
other girls by the braids,  
or snatching their ugly boyfriends  
just because I can.

I don't remember hectically  
hurtling knife after knife  
at the man who took my virginity,  
or sticking a fork into his green eyes.

I don't remember a word of  
advice from behind my back nor  
the calming streams of acid nor  
the difference between the twin moons.

I remember the grey pigeons fed  
in the city park from the hands

of a blind old man with eight fingers  
and all-weather boots.

I remember the last breath of mint  
of a local fortune teller who never  
predicted her own death nor  
the late return of her sons.

I remember the open sea between  
Poland and Scandinavia and the giant  
who chopped a piece of a mountain  
and made a step stone for his wife.

And I remember lying at death  
and getting a gentle kiss from  
the fairest and the darkest African  
prince on a sunburnt horse.

## **Prosody on an Amusing Day Full of Luck**

I speak my motherfather tongue  
with a broken tongue, broken like  
a boneless snail with broken luck.

I sing to my tongueless spineless muse  
with a wide open mouth and no tongue to speak of,  
not even on a ruse-day full of mauve luck.

I ride on the Hwhite Hwhale's tongue,  
with boneless, slack breeze in my maw  
and broken broken broken haste of blood.

I speak my foreign tongue with brawl of  
a broken slug, anaemic, boneless, pale sea tongue  
with a maw of a spineless Hwhite Hwhale out of luck.

I grope my wordless muse like a spineless slug,  
wordless and out of bloodless anaemic luck  
I speak speak speak with a broken tongue.

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