

Monika Herceg

**Selection of poems from the collection *Initial
Coordinates***

Translated by Marina Veverec

escape

we started locking the room at night seeing
grandfather's shadow standing next to our beds
a knife in his hand
he said he heard footsteps around the house
and makes sure they don't drag us into the
woods
for good

shortly after he spoke to the dead
for the first time
and fled leaping
the high fence of our yard
so the neighbors witnessed
four days later we found him
on the other side of town
hidden in a ditch

he said he was fleeing and must not return
someone's chopping people's heads off
and planting them in the woods
to grow an army

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withering

he didn't get a chance to return with us
to live amongst vixens hedgehogs and does
but the image of orchard
he would give us as a gift every spring
with years flourished into a biosystem of his
plums
his systematically rejuvenating big old pear
and the two cherry trees that would redden
always in may

amidst the autumn fusion
we would dig out a tunnel through time
and talk to him through death
overgrown with ivy
full of plum kernels
that nurtured us

once the withering took its turn
autumns ate themselves backwards
no longer of our concern

no one picks plums
and grandfather sits alone
under the old pear
waiting for us to remember

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inheritable diseases

a ring a spring another ring and a few coins
all of this they found in grandma's belly on the
x-ray
we stared at the image and could not agree
whether insanity is inheritable or contagious

for years after she wouldn't come near us
she was a half-doe half-grandma
with mud on her hooves
we feared she would dirty us up
she would plant in us the seeds of autumn
that would overgrow us like weeds

saving the vows of my father
behind the belly button
she told me she had plenty of lads and deer
rumor has it they once found her
even with the priest
by the creek

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grandma's eye

she laid full of dust
old maggoty furniture
of a renovated house
not recognizing us
and in a few weeks
she had wilted like a plant under snow
we could have carried her in our arms
along the entire circumference of the earth
so light almost woolen
but we waited for her to drain out
like juice out of the elderflowers
fearing the death that eats away from inside
slow enough to go unnoticed

at the beginning of february
mother found on her bed
only one frozen eye
the other one probably eaten by the cat
and let a whole bush of jasmine
grow out of it

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rabbit deaths

we carefully stored death into animals
feeding them freshly cut grass and hay
and then drew the same death out of them
painlessly
one incision under the neck

rabbit fur always hung from the old walnut tree
like an oversized coat
and next to the fur suit
the muscles we stripped bare
gazed at us in shame
and swayed in the gusts of wind

my father's stiff body mother
found by the rabbit hutch
one september morning
thus suspecting the axiom
we are rarely aware of

the death we feed to others
sometimes by chance
comes back into ourselves

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bird deaths

no one speaks of birds
in whom the winter settles
the light hardens on their feathers
so they drop from the frozen clouds
feeble and full of landscape

winter corrodes the sparrows' most insistent
inner waymarks
so they plummet through the sky like
kamikaze
into piles of white peace

for generations we have kept the secret
that birds do not die indeed

with the first southern wind
the sunspots in them come alive
taking them back to initial
coordinates

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the water had long escaped before the violence
into the earth crust's cracks and faults
so the forest lake had run dry

only one spring remained
from it drink wild boars and deer
and ghosts that wander
buckshot-packed

out of their heads
like out of acorns
grow a young forest

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harvest

grandma goes first and with a dowsing rod
slender and long
shakes the trees
back hurts from lengthy gathering
we squat then stand and stand
and squat sticky-fingered
not seeing
that the baskets
covered in the purple skin of summer
have been pushed to the part of the earth's orbit
muffled by the sound of ripening
unaware of how
the presence of worms irreversibly eats away
the seams of september

from the very moment of the drop everything awaits the boil

deep barrels will boil
with purple heat
childhood and the brittle bones of august
the whole orchard will boil that stranded toil
of the forthcoming autumn
smelling
of plumb dumplings

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pampering

grandma often used to say
her actual father was
mr mato from the neighboring village
who carries travels tucked under his hat
like rosehip carries its seeds
and visits them as soon as
the last bark goes silent

their teeth-hollowing poverty
he was burying with loam and pushed down
among the bones of the fallen stock
just like the rough fat hands of her mother
full of acorns and hazelnuts
the quails convinced they are women

at times he would stop and light a cigarette
at the crossing of the village road
letting the birds and bees
completely cover him
in a cloud of smoke

he collected kernels of rotten fruits
left behind after harvests
believing in the healthy core
and now it doesn't matter
from which side the winter comes
as there is nothing left to do
but to dig and delve
the necessary pampering of the soil
after a tedious summer

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