

ANA BRNARDIĆ

Translated from Croatian by Chelsea Sanders

The Other Sister

It's good to have a sister. A sister blooms early,
before plants, before the moon
and feathered creatures.
She is the first worldly light under your roof,
a lucid light bulb, the straight and sturdy surface
of a dining room table.
And when people ask me about my family,
nothing is hard to explain
except for that fine golden dust, that falls gently
from a beautiful primrose somewhere in space.
A lovely flower that once had the role of a light bulb,
but with time purposes surrender.

A sister is the likeness of fingers,
the space between one's eyes is a measure of happiness,
in short, a sister is a very simple thing,
a carton of black milk.
And especially, a glass that tips over
on the dining room table
and it's a must to tuck a primrose in, behind the ear.

It's good to be the other sister,
illiterately scribbling with a green crayon
across the handwriting of a school assignment,
sucking on the tendrils of young ABCs
and seeing that in the stem used to climb into the bud
someone has already built fragile but useful stairs.

The other sister sleeps in the basin, drinks from the basin
and slips her foot into the basin, trying it on.
When the stems split into two
thundering trees, the other sister will despair
and look up at the moon like a wolf.

The other sister is part wolf,
part market of treasures. She doesn't let go,
she watches over.

An Accidental Tree

I am a tree, an accidental tree to my daughter.
She touches me because I'm rough, because I have roots
whose five toes peer out from the ground, for her little feet.
My eyes are placed among the leaves,
they tremble in the wind
and turn after my daughter.
Daughters are incandescent planets and as soon as flowers
rise from bed in the morning,
those planets already burn among the petals.
Trees don't know the way
that daughters love you and make you their own.
They just follow spherical fires with leaves
that descend down the stalk,
race down the slopes to an icy stream,
in a swarm of tiny palms.

My mother, too, is an accidental tree
I get up in the morning, I make coffee
and with my mug in hand I walk along her roots
in which trains have cooled down,
thoughts have overgrown and a few blades of grass have shivered.
My feet play on cold keys
and I know that this is an ordinary, gentle happiness.

Night in the Country

I.

Countryside, Daddy, night, beak
in which he carries his daughters
to his mama, in front of the house

We climb down from the rusty beak, snatched
from war, to the the sunny hour,
pretty and pearly sisters,
Daddy flies on, with his greasy feathers he promises himself
to the river and the sedge.
Good.

In the courtyard darkness is boiling in the cauldron
for animals,
a mass of clouds snags on a blackberry bush, the trail leads
to the purple mouth of the house,
inside cloaked in the chilly evening mass
Grandma plays the organ.

She pumps the pedal and in a pedal tone
she harnesses the night.
From the night a heavy country quilt emerges,
on it chicken bones are entwined with
the stench of the pigsty and severed necks.

II.

The first night of the war
Grandma wraps us up in a quilt,
turns off the flickering lamp and closes the lid of darkness,
we listen to her serene snoring,
it carries us to the next morning.

In the morning the organ
confesses to being a sewing machine,
Grandma's back unravels into
doves and war roosters
skinny chickens and slender plum trees

The house is abandoned, overturned into the garden
hints of Grandma lay in the dust
under the bed, among the discarded bottles.

We rush outside, young, odorless earthworms,
just touched by the cold green
and we splash our faces in the garden,
crouching in the naked grass

Behind the garden, Grandma pulls back the black starry quilt
across the river and the orchard,
and until the war passes she rocks us gently, holding us close
to her starched teats as if we're still children,
with a prayer she wishes to disguise herself as a unicorn
and confide to us that stubborn secret,
o, wild unattractiveness

III.

Grandma mourns because we're not holy children
and to us the universe is merely a nocturnal country quilt
whose horns we sail on, the whole night,
through the entire garden, and above the houses

The countryside is in our young leaf bodies
a white magnificent snake of the night, a French chanson
playing from a broken TV set,
a faraway fleece of war beneath the river
in the uniforms of enigmatic relatives

And in the end, after death, what arrives in the mail
but blue driftwood, the endless hand of insomnia,
Grandma even saved the purple copy of Weil, not sensing
how much the divine is tricky in it and leads to the vortex
of the river, right next to the country beach.
I'm opening the purple, because black is black is black,
and on its spine
under the eye of the distrustful country night,
on the backs of the shrill rooster, the beloved dove,
felled spruces,
I gladly push off, push off

On the Cusp of Winter

So that evening in the park
when for a moment, I was a crow in a greasy coat
that I carried you in, an even smaller bird
and my gaze pierced the black branches
against the already black sky

and earlier, that morning in the park
because I stroked for some time
the plush bark of a birch tree
to coax out
something indistinct and wild,
milk or bells

the snow picked up our scent.

You, because you just arrived and everything around you shines.
And only then the droplets
which we dragged behind us like rainy ink
and the protective eye on my crow's body
and you, the bird close to my heart
and a moment later, and the branches that float against the sky
while the evening draws to a close
along different seams than yesterday

the snow picked up our scent.

Because nestled in my coat was freshness,
still untamed, all skin and eyebrows, the flowing universe
one moment a hedgehog, the next a fish, then a sprig of mint-
and your breath was fast and shallow,
the trees gently leaned down to sniff you
before winter, before the descent
of large, greasy birds.

We walked ahead of the snow,
with a festive body coated from the inside with the wool
of all piano concertos no. 1.
And behind us trailed a cloak
of deep blue sky with black lace
made from rare, abandoned branches.