

“SKETCHING OUT A HEROINE”

**A selection of nine poems
from a collection**

by Sanja Lovrenčić

Translated by Una Dimitrijević

COVER TEXT

Longlisted for “Kamov” Award 2021 Shortlisted for “Ivan Goran Kovačić” Award (2022).

As a poet of proven skills, Sanja Lovrenčić sketches a mysterious heroine. Who is she? After reading, it is up to us to conclude. Or to let her continue to take shape within us for a long time. For, this collection of poems counts on the cooperation of a careful watcher and listener, a curious reader sensitive to language and its beyond. Sanja Lovrenčić invites us on an adventurous poetic journey through the poems/episodes of a very special, never fully expressible or sharply drawn protagonist, with whose joys, doubts, insights and resignations we easily empathize.

(Dorta Jagić, ed.)

<https://www.mala-zvona.hr/en/product/sketch-for-a-heroine/>
www.sanja-lovrencic.com

(manifold)

once there was a woman who lowered a plumb line
into the ocean in hope that it would topple

who listened through a golden funnel, until the sea
came up into her ear, through her ear into her palace

who tried to leave her prints upon the water

(a flower for a flower)

oh, the little flower-seller offering her frosted violets:

she went to get them into a deep forest, a deep tree trunk,

a deep dwelling

she went to get them from the bottom of the sea, going, going, going – oh lord,

how many goings! – always coming back, never stopping –

and now she pleads: a small barter, one thing for another,

anything for something, a tiny gold penny to tuck into her pocket,

even if it disappears, melts, defenceless to all kinds of darkness –

a flower for a flower, if you please, for all are the same and one

cannot live without living

(bocca della verita)

it's a great truthtelling mouth that always
defies her anew, reminding her of her place

the moment she wakes the mouth gapes and she already
starts sliding down the black throat before her eyes open

she must do something different, figure out how to exist
a new way every day, like a rabbit darting off in new directions

she must do something unutterably different so the mouth
may yawn its truths into the void –

smuggle beyond all insight a bubble of emptiness
with enough room for a lake –

that lake, that song of the world

(multiplying rivers)

and also the one who multiplied rivers, turning one into six –
tiring work, unfathomably long, that digging of riverbed upon riverbed

and since she was very, very thorough, she planted
seaweed following a strict plan,
but there wasn't enough water in the source,
there simply wasn't –

she thought she could solve it by thinking, she thought of water
in stones in skies in all things white –
she made whistles so her fingers would not be idle,
a whistle for every river,
but there wasn't enough water, there simply wasn't –

no, not rivulets! what's the point of having six rivulets
instead of one river! she explained to her flying creatures
desperately hoping they would come to her aid
ethereal as they are –

and she'll have to fill in, she'll have to give up –
but which of those dry beds, her children
made of air, her cradles of the earth?

(clear and uncontested)

maybe she was given a sword, but in it saw
a blade of grass
so she planted it watered it –
(with tears, all grows better from extremes)
weeded it added fertiliser conscientiously following instructions –
(since her trust in conscience knows no bounds)

and now? will her blade flower, will other
flourishings above her bloom,
create lasting confusion?
(and yet, those flowers no one sees –)

or will the self-proclaimed gardener begin to think
more logically and soil her hands down to the roots –
extracting a cold lustre from the scabbard of the earth?

(calligraphy)

and when she gets down to business, she arms herself with buckets of paint
and broom-brushes and draws a line through the whole town –

and rooftops, and treetops, and the sky! –

it is merely a mark, the number of a day she enters into too quickly,
too quickly leaves behind

(cities and suburbs)

she exits – leaves – the city in ruin – *now give me another!*

there's a shortage of space, you can get a village with uncertain borders – no, no borders! – a skyline? – no matter, how many houses? – one next to none – no, all those are wrong deliberations, white shirts, blue skies, that is my village –

she leaves the suburb in ruin – the architecture was not exactly grand, splendour lies elsewhere – *go on, invent another palace, not always that little house of leaves!*

she builds a little house of leaves, but even that is not so simple – *too much? too little? – that material makes nothing smooth nor clean –*

she leaves the city in ruin and puts a black blindfold over her eyes – oh, the divine coolness of silk
wipes away the limitations of those scenes! – she opens her eyes,
looks at the black silk, a pattern that makes her stop

(no working hours)

and everything was still open – bakeries,
butchers, the useful and useless, interrupted
sentences floundering, their little roots grasping onto
handles and armrests, and the street was open to the sun

commands and orders were echoing, new floors
were being laid, and the land was crumbling neither
faster nor slower at the edges –

and still everything was open, pockets and vowels
and loose car boots, lines arbitrarily fading and
thickening and things being done many times over –

and she sat and promised: for you! and you! and you!
everything you wish for and might like!

cakes appeared randomly, she sliced and when she had
nothing more to slice, she sliced through voices
grumbling: too much sugar, too much fat –
it's fatty, it's sweet, she repeated repentant,
though it was lean to the bone

(new name)

in the longest night
she seeks a new name to take her under its wing:
it must contain life from a stem and water from a source
and the sea in all its directions
and the lake in which hides the song of the world –
and rigid winter grasses and fallen leaves of every colour,
warm animal breath
and scales, feathers, claws, wingedness and flight-song
fingers in clay
all fabrics from the green loom
listening closely: is it a nightingale? a cuckoo already?
have the wild ducks returned –
leaves – leafbuds – leafing – leafy –
consonances, wheat stalks –
imprints, shells, tracks, hard mineral colouring
the moon's path across the city
breathing, breathing