

Marko Vešović: The Polish cavalry

Daybreak

I'm doing sentry duty. At dawn. Nearby is a house. Actually,
a yellowish hovel. Beside it – a poplar above a well.
The poplar is as tall, it somehow seems to me, as
the well is deep. Above the house white smoke is unfolding
Like a baby's diapers.
In the house a child is crying. Long. For years already.
It seems: The shack would come down if the child fell silent.
Anything can come to mind when one is
Doing sentry duty.
All of a sudden, a goldenheaded girl comes out of the house,
She's about ten years old – twelve, at the most.
Missing a leg. A gorgeous invalid. An angel on crutches.
With a ruddy face, as if from the daybreak.
And I started crying. From that ruddiness on her face.
From that daybreak on crutches! All kinds of things
can cross your mind when you are doing sentry duty.
And the child's weeping seems never to stop. As if it had
its own electric motor. The weeping which, it seems,
will not cease, as long as this world exists. As long as there is
a soul alive under these skies. A weeping that will
resound through all eternities. For time, when you are a sentry,
moves slowly like a glacier. When you are a sentry, your soul
sometimes hears galloping messengers bringing the news
that for a long time, under these skies, there's nothing.
Not even you. On sentry duty.

Signature

I'm running home with my little daughter –
Again, shells have surprised us on the street.
Shells have, for centuries, been falling every day,
And every day they surprise us.
I'm hurrying her on with angry words:
Transferring my rage from the Serb gunners
To a child awaited for ten years.
Let me write my name, she tells me, as we were passing
A patch of virgin snow in the park.
Instead of scolding her,
I – God knows why – let her forefinger
Break the delicate whiteness
And then, around the Cyrillic IVANA VEŠOVIĆ
My forefinger described a circle
Impenetrable

Like in fairy-tales.

This shooting

This shooting has gotten into our blood. Without shooting
(just like without your morning coffee) you can't get your day going.
And do you remember how, at the start of the war, after a shell
burst a hush would fall, like the deadly silence when someone
in a bar blabbed something against Tito or the Party?
Shells have now gotten into our bones. When there is a silence,
you're as taut as a string. You keep thinking: My God, what are
they fixing for us now? With that silence they only instill
more fear into our bones. But as soon as a heavy
machine gun makes itself heard, I loosen up right away,
my wife begins making a pie, the kids start chattering around
the house. They are shooting again-- everything's all right, then.
Yesterday, back home from work, I asked: was there any shooting
while I was gone? My youngest daughter told me:
You should have seen, Dad,
how nicely two of them whizzed by.

In the evening you lie down in bed

and you know you are lying down in vain: tomorrow you will get up still more enervated than when you lay down. In the morning you get up from bed and you know that you are getting up in vain: yesterday's day is awaiting you, with yesterday's stress. With the humiliations of the day before yesterday. With the despair of the day before that. This siege has been going on not for two years but for a single day that has no end.

From this I could find rest, it seems to me,
only by the sea. And who knows if we will ever see it again?
Will I ever again be able to stand on those cliffs
where the air currents are so strong they
return the cap you threw?!

But I do not long, this time, for the sea with the fleshy
leaves of agaves in which the names
of love are carved. For the olive trees feverishly
twisted like green laocoons. For the hats of jellyfish
that look like silken tents from Oriental
tales. I do not long for the monotony of waves which
the poet compares to Homer's metrics. I do not long for that ink
with which one could write billions and billions of
Iliads and *Odysseys*.

I long for that sadness that
comes over you when, looking at the eternal blueness
you listen to the murmur of that eternity.
For the sadness that tells you that you have a soul again.
Maybe not even for that sadness, but I long for that
Magnificent and balmy emptiness.

To plunge the soul into the emptiness that relaxes.
That heals and rejuvenates. To stare for hours not even
at the open seas, nor above the open seas, but – just so!
The Bosnian way. Until you forget both what you are and where
you are and where you're from and what your name is.
The only thing you know is that within you are – miles
and miles of emptiness. And that the sea's vastness has sucked
Out of you all the centuries, all the way to Adam.
The blue emptiness stretches to the end of the world and, backwards,
to its beginning. And you grasp – actually, you don't grasp, you feel
it on your palate: the sweetness that will take over after Judgment
Day!
Everything will be obliterated, like a child's scribble on a blackboard
and only pure rapture will remain!
So you taste ahead of time, albeit with a teaspoon only,
The bliss the world will explode in!

Girl's blouse

It's getting dark, and in the west someone's foot
has knocked over a jug of wine, pouring it all over the horizon.
The new moon looks like horns on a helmet in which,
in films, Moses is shown. Pines smell
of lemons and incense

A soldier, long and brittle like a rye stalk, is doing sentry duty.
He's brittle with youth and love. Carefully he pulls out
of his breast pocket a girl's white blouse. And he plunges
his face in it. He drinks its scent for a long time. Those five
or six grams of fabric he could pull through a wedding ring.

A sight divinely unutterable. Saying it in words
would be like measuring the weight
of a sun's ray on a scale.

Suddenly, from all this – from the wine-colored west
from the new moon with horns, from the girl's blouse,
whose scent can, like a thread, lead you out of hell—
suddenly, from all this, I feel relieved in my soul.
And in the world.

You know that war still exists
on earth like a black ball of yarn. But the soul could
play with it like a kitten. Death still shows through everything.
Yet not like a skull showing through the skin of the face
But like a seed through a grape: making it more magical.

Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović