

Madara Gruntmane

Poems

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She loves so demandingly
wanting to prove she isn't a mistake
on the map of the world
sticking her stories into the cracks
of the house's fissured wall
She demonstrates so desperately
that she is good
She traces protective symbols on scarred faces
promising eternal success and immortality
She lets them climb on and climb off
Lets them sweep in and not clean up
She draws an orange on her breasts, hands over
darts, and says:
Imagine it's the sun
You're not allowed to hit that bit
There won't be anything to eat

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They licked each other's wounds
transforming into werewolves
She howled
at night and at midnight
pulled mornings over her head
like a plastic bag
Suffocating
her throat squeezed shut
by the cigarette smoke
in which he would hide
clattering and rattling
from everything forbidden and denied
smearing himself over every part of her
On Monday morning she crawled away

for good

Narcoses**1992**

She crouches down outside the "Poppy" café
Through the blurry window, chickens on a spit
can be seen
turning meditatively
Mum, I really can't walk anymore
An hour later, a smiling surgeon paws her
stomach
His eyes are blue lakes
Here's a little laughing gas: now you won't be
so frightened
I'm not going to die
A huge black whirlpool pulls her in
Four hours later, she remembers her name
She's eleven years old
A night of brutal pain
Liquid pouring soundlessly out of the catheter
Old women groaning all around her
She's in the adults' ward
She has been in the adults' ward for some time
now
The hospital is becoming more real than home
At the hospital, no one listens behind the door
while she pees
At the hospital, only women touch her bottom
When she gets home, she cries

1997

Check her pupils, is she on drugs?
Check for lice
Look at how her face is painted
Probably got a screw loose
I was at the carnival at the Art School
My friend drew squares on my face
And then you fell over, drunk
No, I wasn't drunk
I was pushed
Who pushed you?
I don't know
I was running down the stairs
She's definitely got a screw loose
I'm telling you, I was pushed by one of the
five men I had just escaped from

Good morning
Lieutenant Leja here
Say it, you were raped, weren't you
I escaped
Doctor, in my opinion the victim should
undergo a medical examination
I don't need to be examined
Please, I'd rather you told me why I can't
move my left arm
Everything in order
Why were you alone at night in a dark
courtyard?
I wasn't alone, I was with Jānis before he left
Then two men lifted me by the armpits and
three men followed us
I ended up in the courtyard because I was
carried there
What happened after that?
After that they surrounded me and I was in
the middle
After that
After that I escaped

That's impossible

I came at two of them with my fists and I ran
through

Then they ran after me, down the stairs

After that I don't remember

I woke up crashed into a wall

Doctor, will I still be able to play the piano?

My left arm and shoulder won't move

Why did you wait so long before doing
anything?

The police don't believe you

Are you sure that's how it all was?

That's how it all was

Ask the man who found me

He's my mum's husband

How did he come to be there?

Because he works at the Art School

Does my mum know what's happened to me?

Mum, don't cry now

Nothing too bad is wrong with me

Everything will be OK

They'll put me back together in the operation

You'll see, everything will be OK

And my head will heal

Mum

Doctor, I'm terrified

I really want to live this time

Wake up, wake up

The operation's over

Try to relax

It hurts, that means you're alive

2005

First you need to go to the office window to pay
45 lats
Through that door in front of you
Ward 6
You'll be next
Have you eaten?

Why have you decided to do this?
I already have 3 children
There's no money for a fourth
Of course
My husband won't let me
He wants his freedom

But you already have a big belly
Yes
5 months
Couldn't come sooner

The woman who will be next doesn't talk and cries into a pillow
The woman who is next lies on the table and gasps hysterically

Relax
It's too late
When you wake up, it'll all be over

1 new message
Jānis: please let me know when you regain consciousness

2007

Bend your back into a square
I said, make a square shape with your back
I don't understand
What don't you understand?
How old are you, if you don't understand?
Do you want me to mess up your injection?

Ssh, ssh
Give her something to calm her down
Don't cry, or we can't give you your injection

Where's my husband?
We had an agreement

Little girl, I'm the only one who makes agreements here

Doctor Gailis
What are all these amateur dramatics about?
This is an operating theatre, not a service station

Everything will be fine
We'll start straight away
Can you feel your legs?
I can't feel anything
Scalpel
Scissors
Let's sew her up

Congratulations
You have a healthy baby

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Breath like a jammed tremolo
Paris opens up its caring lungs
so that you, darling girl
overlooked by others
can once again take a breath and say
I am the Eiffel Tower people ride up and
down me
Art lovers despise me
I was only planned as a short-term project
But look
In a single day you are acknowledged
in photographs fridge magnets figurines from
China
by thousands of people who silently
experience
proposals at your splayed feet

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My dear Inuk
I see you rowing
to me in your kayak
with a bunch of saxifrage in your hands
your face hidden under your hood
That day you shyly told me
not to be surprised
that you had left roots on the flowers
The plant is perennial
with a sparse root system
so it will do just fine with me
It's so warm in your igloo and
the Gulf Stream warms
your sea

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My hands will always be hot
so I can fry pancakes on them to feed you
I'll spread your sweat on a sandwich
and you'll smell like laundry detergent
We'll auction off your obsession with yourself wrapped in indigo lace
to museums of decorative arts
In three years' time you'll come to an exhibition of my X-rays

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He put slices of bread in the toaster
cut into neat halves
only he knew how many
He cracked three eggs
saying that the shells here were harder than at home
His expression changed 5 times a minute
from an old man's grimace to a teenager
who's just discovered he has another erection
She sat on a wooden bench fidgeting waiting for breakfast
It was snowing calmly outside the window
and the smell of omelette kept filling the kitchen
For the next two mornings they'll eat breakfast in silence
She grabbed onto the image of possible mornings
She stared right into his face
He got embarrassed just like six months ago a year ago and before that too
He gets embarrassed once every six months
She marks an X in her notebook

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God our Father

Dad

Which is more accurate

Those are synonyms

God our Dad

You'll be my Dad — right?

Help me pull together

my trembling legs and wine breath

Help me love the close and not the distant

Give me enough common sense to come back

when I leave

Teach me to love you

Show me the door which will let me get away when I step through it

And please make him

give me back my face

I can't touch it

May it be done

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Going down Mārtiņa Street

I knew for sure that when I got home

I'd be frying up some boiled sausage

eating it with sour cream

It's a little after eight in the morning

and the sausage is sizzling and smelling good in the pan

Oh Mama everything tasted different in the 90s

Back then I felt your love for me and asked for seconds

Even now I remember the rotten smell of the wooden shack on Apšu Street

Back then I couldn't understand why you took so long to come home

and why you chose his wicked hands

Maybe I still can't

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Look how things turned out
I thought you were far away
that I wouldn't get to know your family
Look how things turned out
You live in my
ovaries
Look how things turned out
You all pussyfoot around
sowing shit
fashioning hearts out of shit
and then you live and die
in my ovaries
Look how things turned out
Just miserable

From the collection "Drunk Daddy's Girl"
(2018)

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but great love
doesn't suit me
well, take a look
at how lovely I am
tall
with thick lips
a wet tongue
expectantly hot
always ready to get
hit in the face

Translated from the Latvian by Marta Ziemelis and Richard O'Brien
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