

**Mirsad Sijarić**  
20 POEMS

TO DEFEND

I JOINED UP WITH THE RESISTANCE  
IT WAS ABOUT TIME  
THE BATTLES HAVE ALREADY BEEN GOING ON FOR A WHILE  
AND EVEN THOUGH WE'VE ORGANIZED A DEFENSE  
THE ENEMY IS ADVANCING WITH CERTAINTY  
THE CITY'S SHRINKING THE OUTSKIRTS ALMOST GONE  
THE WALLS OF OUR HOUSES ARE SOLID  
THE NEWS REPORT OUR SUCCESS  
THE FIGHTERS' MORALE IS HIGH  
BUT I DON'T EXACTLY FEEL SAFE HERE  
I ASK MYSELF HOW LONG CAN WE HOLD OUT  
THINGS ARE GETTING TOUGHER  
BANDAGES ARE LOW  
FOOD JUST ONCE A DAY  
WE TAKE AMMUNITION FROM THE DEAD  
BUT WHAT'LL HAPPEN WHEN THEY'RE GONE

*Translated from the Bosnian by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO LIE DOWN

I LIE DOWN BEHIND A TREE  
ON THE GROUND IN THE GRASS  
I SEE THE MOON THROUGH THE CLOUDS  
THE CONTOURS OF HOUSES AND TREES  
I SEE THE DARKNESS  
EXCEPT FOR THE CRICKETS  
THE SILENCE IS DULL  
SEEMS LIKE THE ENEMY IS TAKING A REST  
BUT I COULD SWEAR I HEAR THEM  
TWO THREE OF THEM  
I WAIT  
TERRIFIED  
ALONE  
THEY MUST BE REAL CLOSE

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO CONTRIBUTE

ARMED AS IF WE WERE HUNTING A FOX  
OR LYING IN WAIT FOR A WIDE-EYED GROUSE  
WE LAUGH AND OPEN FIRE  
AT OUR INVISIBLE ENEMIES  
SO WE TOO CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE GENERAL BREAKDOWN  
AND INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF THINGS

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO BE EAGER TO

OUR RESOLUTION INSTILLS CERTAINTY  
THERE AREN'T MANY OF US  
STILL WE LEFT THE FEAR BEHIND IN OUR VALLEYS  
HOME WIFE FAMILY – ABSTRUSE NOTIONS  
WE CHECK OUR WEAPONS  
TIGHTEN OUR BELTS  
WE'RE READY  
THAT MEANS  
EAGER TO KILL TO BURN TO CRUSH  
TO SET OFF ONCE AGAIN  
FOR THE FINAL SHOWDOWN

*Translated by D. Latinović*

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TO FORGET

IN MOMENTS OF CALM  
AS I PASS THE SO-CALLED STREETS BY THE SO-CALLED BUILDINGS  
OF OUR SO-CALLED CITY  
THE SKELETONS OF CIVILIZATION ARISE EVERYWHERE  
FURNITURE CLOTHING PHOTOGRAPHS  
MARRIAGE PHILOSOPHY  
FORGOTTEN  
TO EVERY QUESTION FIRE PROVIDES  
QUICK AND SIMPLIFIED ANSWERS

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO NOT UNDERSTAND

DON'T CRY  
MAMA SAID WE WON'T SLEEP IN THE KITCHEN ANYMORE  
THAT WE'LL GO TO SCHOOL TOMORROW  
SHE SAID THAT SOON  
WHEN THE SNOW MELTS  
WE'LL TAKE A BUS  
TO THE SEA AND GO SWIMMING  
SO BE GOOD  
DON'T ASK FOR DADDY  
CAUSE THEN SHE'LL CRY  
AND KEEP TELLING US  
WE'RE STILL TOO YOUNG  
TO UNDERSTAND

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO IMAGINE

WE HAVE ALL BEEN STRUCK BY THE DEATH  
OF THE POLICEMAN FROM OUR BUILDING  
MEN WERE SMOKING IN A CIRCLE  
MAMA WAS WHISPERING TO THE NEIGHBOR  
HOLDING THE ONLY DOLL I STILL HAVE IN HER ARMS  
THE POLICEMAN'S DOG WAS SNIFFING AT A TIN OF SARDINES  
AN ELDER GENTLEMAN  
WAS TALKING TO HIMSELF  
ABOUT HOW THE RUSSIANS AND THE AMERICANS WERE COMING  
HOW THERE WAS NO MORE BERLIN  
HOW NO ONE WOULD BE SAVED  
I GET UP  
SPINNING  
IMAGINING I AM THE EARTH

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO RECOGNIZE

THIS TIME YOU WON'T CHEAT ON ME  
WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER TOO LONG  
WE'RE IN THE SAME ROOM  
IT'S BEEN TEN YEARS  
I RECOGNIZE YOUR VOICE  
I KNOW YOUR STEPS  
AND YOUR BREATH  
AS YOU PEEP THROUGH THE CURTAINS  
DOWN BELOW  
YOU LISTEN TO THE SHOTS AND GIGGLE  
NOW  
I TURN  
I KNOW IT'S YOU  
EVEN THOUGH YOU NEVER WERE  
THIS TIME YOU WON'T CHEAT ON ME

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO PAY

THEY LEFT THE FIRST MORNING  
AFTER NEW YEAR'S  
SINCE THEN TEN  
TWENTY THIRTY MONTHS  
HAVE PASSED  
I NO LONGER REMEMBER  
I FORGOT THEIR FACES  
ALL I REMEMBER IS THE COLD  
THEY STILL HAVEN'T CALLED  
I ASKED EVERYWHERE  
NO ONE'S HEARD ANYTHING ABOUT THEM  
THE CONNECTION WAS RISKY AND UNRELIABLE  
BUT WE PAID A LOT  
WE PAID AS MUCH AS WE HAD TO

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO KNOW

I DON'T KNOW  
 MY PHONE HASN'T RUNG FOR A LONG TIME  
 AND IT'S DARK IN THE HALLWAY  
 AFTER SUNSET  
 I DON'T OPEN THE DOOR FOR ANYONE  
 THE PEOPLE FROM THE NEXT APARTMENT  
 LEFT QUIETLY  
 AS IF THEY HADN'T LIVED LOUDLY  
 I NEVER LIGHT A FIRE AT NIGHT  
 I'M AFRAID THEY'LL NOTICE  
 AND I SIT AT MY TABLE LESS AND LESS AFTER DARK  
 IT'S TOO QUIET TO THINK OF FOOD  
 FROM TIME TO TIME I LISTEN TO THE RADIO THAT'S TRUE  
 BUT ALL I CAN  
 REALLY TUNE IN TO IS FEAR  
 AND WHEN THEY SHELL US  
 I'M CALM  
 SINCE I KNOW  
 HE TURNS HIS BACK TO THEM  
 AND PRAYS FOR MY SOUL

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO POSTPONE

A MESSAGE CAME INSTEAD OF HIM  
 THAT THEY WERE ATTACKED AND HE'LL BE DELAYED A DAY OR TWO  
 I'M A LITTLE WORRIED  
 IT'S REALLY TOO BAD I PREPARED A GREAT SOUP  
 CAKE MADE OF RICE  
 I GOT A CANDLE  
 EVERYTHING WAS SET  
 ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS COME  
 YOU KNOW  
 I THOUGHT OF TELLING HIM TONIGHT  
 THE WAY IT IS  
 WE'LL HAVE TO POSTPONE EVERYTHING

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO START

I ASK MYSELF JUST HOW MUCH CAN I BELIEVE HIM  
HE'S GONE FOR DAYS  
THEN BURSTS IN AFTER DARK  
WASHES UP AND EATS  
SLEEPS THE WHOLE DAY  
AND WHEN I ASK HIM SOMETHING - HE FROWNS  
OF COURSE HE BRINGS CANS OF FOOD AND CIGARETTES  
SOMETIMES EVEN BREAD BUT  
WHETHER IT'S A FEELING OF GUILT OR COMPASSION  
I DON'T KNOW  
HE ACTS STRANGE  
I'M STARTING TO DOUBT

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO BE READY

HE SAYS:  
PUT YOUR COAT ON  
GET THE LAUNDRY READY FOOD AND THE GOLD  
DON'T TOUCH THE PAINTINGS  
WE'LL ONLY TAKE WHAT WE NEED  
I'LL BE AT THE DOOR  
AND THE CIGARETTES ARE WITH ME  
IF THEY BURST INTO THE BUILDING TONIGHT  
PLEASE  
BE QUIET AND BE READY  
BE WITH ME

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO BE CAREFUL

WE BRACE UP A HOLLOW WALL WITH BOOKS  
 THE NEIGHBOR DADDY AND ME  
 WE PULL THE BLINDS DOWN ON THE WINDOWS  
 BARRICADE THE DOOR WITH A DRESSER  
 IT'S QUIET TONIGHT BUT  
 WE GET THE WATER CANNISTERS READY  
 PUT THE BANDAGES WHERE WE CAN REACH THEM  
 WE'VE GOT OUR SHOES ON  
 THE CARTRIDGE IS IN THE BARREL  
 IT'S QUIET TONIGHT BUT EVEN SO

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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TO DISCUSS

WE ARE SITTING ON THE BALCONY IN THE DARK AND DISCUSSING  
 THE MEANING OF ART EXISTANCE IN PEACE  
 THE PROSAIC NATURE OF THIS PHENOMENON ANGERS AND STIRS US  
 THE ARHYTHMIC POEM OF WAR IS ALWAYS LOUDER  
 WE WITHDRAW INTO THE APARTMENT  
 CARRYING OUR CHAIRS WITH US  
 THE DISCUSSION STOPS  
 SOMEONE CRACKS A JOKE

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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WE CAME BACK TO THE BEGINNING

WE CAME BACK TO THE BEGINNING  
 AND WE KNOW IT'LL BE HARD  
 TO START ALL OVER AGAIN  
 WE'LL HAVE TO REDISCOVER FEAR AND CONFUSION  
 THE ADVANTAGES OF FIRE AND STONE  
 MAKE POTS KNIVES AND CUSTOMS  
 EAT BLOODY MEAT  
 AND SWEAT IN SKINS AS WE HUDDLE BY THE FIRE AT NIGHT  
 LISTEN TO THE WILD AND UNRELIABLE GODS  
 AS THEY DISAPPEAR INTO THE UNDERBRUSH AT THE SOUND OF HOOVES  
 TIME WILL PASS  
 AND WE'LL REMEMBER THE HEARDS OF HORSES  
 THE BATTLING DOGS  
 OUR WOMEN WILL WEAR WHITE GARMENTS  
 AND THEY'LL HAVE LONG FINELY COMBED HAIR  
 WE'LL WRITE AND READ BOOKS  
 WE'LL DISCUSS TRUTH AGAIN

DEAL IN WOOL AND SPICES  
 EXPERIMENT WITH MERCURY  
 WE'LL BELIEVE  
 WE'LL BE HUMAN  
 NOTHING WILL BE ALIEN TO US  
 THE GARDENS OF OUR HOUSES  
 WILL BE A PLEASANT SIGHT TO EVERY EYE  
 BUT  
 TIME WILL PASS AGAIN  
 AND THE SORROWFUL FACES WITH DULL GAZES RETURN  
 GRAY STREETS DESSICATED FLOWERS  
 THEN WAR SONGS WILL BE HEARD  
 THE UNBRIDLED CLATTER OF SHOTS RATTLING AT DUSK  
 AND ONCE MORE CITIES WILL TURN TO DUST  
 WE'VE COME BACK TO THE BEGINNING  
 IN OUR BEGINNING IS OUR END  
 WE'RE AWARE OF ALL THAT HAS PASSED  
 AND WE KNOW OF EVERYTHING THAT WILL BE  
 THE HORROR MAKES US WISER AND MORE SILENT  
 WE RAISE OUR HANDS TO THE SKY  
 AND AUGUR WITH ALL OUR HEART  
 THAT THE CIRCLE WILL FINALLY BE BROKEN

*Translated by Ammiel Alcalay*

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LIKE IN THOSE WONDERFUL MOVIES

SEVEN MONTHS PREGNANT  
 SUDDENLY  
 HER HANDS RED AS EARTH  
 ACQUIRED SUPERHUMAN POWER  
 LIKE IN THOSE WONDERFUL MOVIES  
 UNDER THE PRESSURE OF HER FINGERS  
 POTS WERE TURNING HANDLE – LESS  
 SPOONS DISTORTED LIKE TUNELESS WOMEN BAR SINGERS  
 AND KNIVES MADE OF BEST  
 METAL AND ALLOY  
 WERE SIMPLY MELTING AS TALLOW – CANDLES  
 WORKING IN THE RESTAURANT KITCHEN  
 OF THE CITY BAKERY  
 SHE DID MORE DAMAGE THAN WAS OF USE  
 STILL SHE DISTURBED NOBODY  
 HEAVY THOUGH WITH HER LIVING SWELLING  
 THAT WOMAN SMILING  
 FLEW AS A BIRD



HUMAN AND OBJECT  
 CONDITION AND FORM SHE WAS CHANGING  
 ONLY THE TOOTHLESS PLASTIC PLATES  
 STAYED THE SAME  
 PRESUMPTUOUS  
 AS IF CHEMISTRY  
 WAS THE SOLE TRUE SCIENCE

*Translated by Dunja Latinović*

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FEAR IS A PAINTER

FEAR IS A PAINTER  
 PAINTING FACES PALE  
 PENETRATING YOU AND ME EQUALLY  
 IT DREW WAVES ONTO ROCKS  
 BROUGHT BARBARIANS TO ROME  
 CORRODED THE SHIP HULL CUT ANCHORS' CHAINS  
 FEAR RESTS IN THE HAREM OF FRIEDRICH II HOENSTAUFF  
 LURKING BEHIND THE VEILS  
 IT THREW SILK INTO THE FIRE  
 FEAR IS IN THE DARK  
 STABBING THE OX IN THE STALL RAM IN THE PEN  
 SNEAKING AROUND TENT  
 AWAKEING THE SHEPHERD IT MAKES THE DOG HARKEN  
 FEAR LIFTS A WOMAN'S SKIRT  
 TO LOVERS IT BRINGS DOUBT  
 CHILDREN'S TOYS IT BREAKS  
 FEAR IS A WAITER AT THE PROM NIGHT  
 POURING SHAMELESS BLOOD INTO WINE  
 MAKING DANCERS TRIP  
 IT BREAKS THE RECORD PLAYER  
 TURNS BITTERS THE BLUE SMOKE OF HASHISH  
 CALLING FOR THE GHOSTS  
 AT MIDNIGHT IT HANGS MASKS ON THE CEILING  
 AND STOMPS IN THE ATTIC  
 FEAR AT THE TABLE IN THE ARMCHAIR  
 SMOKING YOUR CIGARETTES READING KAFKA  
 FEAR TREATING ROOTS AT THE DENTIST'S  
 REMOVING TARTAR  
 IT DRIES THE INK OUT OF A PEN  
 IT SCATTERS PAPER  
 BRINGS WORK TO RUIN  
 FEAR SPRAWLED ON A COFFIN SMILING  
 SETS MINES IN THE FIELDS  
 CROPS ON FIRE

FEAR IN THE COFFEE IN THE ASHTRAY IN THE ASHES  
 SWAYING THE BUS AROUND BLOCKS THE DRIVER'S VIEW  
 INCITES DISORDER  
 IT DRIVES SMELTERS TO STRIKE  
 FEAR IS A DEMAGOGUE  
 INSIDE THE BOOKS INSIDE THE GOD INSIDE THE DEVIL  
 FEAR IS FAITH  
 WRITTEN DRAWN PAINTED INVENTED  
 FEAR THE BLACKNESS OF A CROW  
 FEAR THE SHIVER OF THE BLACKNESS OF A CROW  
 DISAPPEARED IN THE AIR SHATTERING

*Translated by Dunja Latinović*

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THE WIZARD IS SURROUNDED BY A TALL WALL

DUE TO A STRANGE DESIGN  
 IN CHILDHOOD ALREADY  
 THE WIZARD WAS DETERMINED  
 HIS FORMAL EDUCATION WAS LONG AND HARD  
 CONTRARY TO THE GENERAL OPINION  
 ABOUT THIS SORT OF PEOPLE  
 HE STUDIED MATHEMATICS  
 SOCIOLOGY PSYCHOLOGY AND LOGIC  
 MAGIC WORDS  
 CAME ONLY IN THE END

BEFORE IT IS TIME  
 NO ONE MUST SEE THE WIZARD  
 HE WORKS SURROUNDED BY A TALL WALL  
 SURROUNDED BY THE SUBORDINATED AND THE APPROVED  
 THE WORK IS GRIEVOUS AND HARD  
 A HUGE NUMBER OF PETRIFIED  
 TRANSFORMED SLEEPING DEAF AND MUTE  
 WHO ARE WAITING TO BE TREATED

HE IS DEDICATED  
 WORKING LONGER THAN NEEDED  
 WHEN HE GOES HOME  
 HE WEARS HIS CITIZEN SUIT  
 ALWAYS SHAVED  
 NEVER WEARING A HAT  
 NO ONE MUST RECOGNIZE THE WIZARD

THE WIZARD IS IN FACT AN ARCHEOLOGIST

DIGGING BELOW THE SURFACE  
SEARCHING FOR THE TRUE MEANING OF THINGS

Translated by Dunja Latinović

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WHILE HE IS WRITING POETRY

LOKI THE GOD OF MISCHIEF AND EVIL  
WITH SHINY AND TWISTED HORNS  
IS COMFORTABLY SPRAWLED IN A LEATHER ARMCHAIR  
SMOKING AND SKIMMING THE DAILY PAPER  
LOOKING FOR EXAMPLES FOR HISTORY OF HUMAN PATIENCE  
WORTHY OF RESPECT  
FOR CENTURIES NOW IN HIS ROBE AND SLIPPERS  
THE GOD OF FIRE WITH HIS HOSTILITY  
TO LIGHT  
IS BLOWING SMOKE SMILING  
AND WAITING FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT  
THE MODERN TIMES EXALTED  
APPRECIATED  
FOLLOWED ADMIRING  
EXAMPLES OF HIS WORK  
WHEREAS LOKI HAS NOT BEEN THAT PROUD AND ARROGANT  
SINCE THE DAY HE RECEIVED THE FLATTERING TITLE  
OF FATHER OF WORLD EVIL  
  
THE NUMBER OF THE RECRUITED TO THE RIGHT SIDE  
IS GETTING CLOSE TO THE IDEAL MEASURE  
LOKI IS EMPTYING HIS PIPE  
ODIN IS WRITING POETRY  
THE WORLD WILL FALL

*Translated by Dunja Latinović*

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