

Yuliya Musakovska, *The God of Freedom* (selection), transl. by Olena Jennings and the author

SUCH LOVE

Such love it is, a hot lump in your throat;
It is without any halftones or relative meanings,
Loved not half-heartedly, but with the full sun and sea,
It is loved hyacinth-like, violet-like, and unconditionally.
It is so uncovered and raw like an early morning,
It is so striking, you can't tell if it heals or wounds.
It has been promised—your knees go weak and your armor is broken;
It is like a long-awaited train stop that you missed on purpose;
It is like a roar and a voice amidst it saying: it's just a thunderstorm;
It is like a street musician that has been slaughtered at Pidzamche;
It is like rammed boats and rivers that have gone shallow;
Like one hundred fifty-five children deprived of their fathers' care;
Like the names of the lost places which you are never tired of saying;
Like the highest grace and the worst curse;
Like the black grass, bird nests turned to ashes and the whisper of the void.
Such love it is which has grown deep into you

and will never let go.

**Pidzamche—an area in the city of Lviv with an industrial past and a railway station*

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FIVE HEARTS

I carry five hearts inside me.
Sometimes the rascals conspire between themselves
and start a ruckus
like a flock of mad clocks
turning my blood into a rain-drenched river.
The heart of a mother that is always alert.
The heart of a wife that is hot and smells good.
The heart of a daughter that I keep forgetting.
The heart of a bee that doesn't let me sit still.

The heart that speaks,
crowds out and strives to push away the rest,
like a cuckoo chick in another's nest.

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THE VOW

Do you take this man
with his extreme sense of justice,
with his broken sleep,
his dual nature —
one of his faces an oasis and the other a sandstorm;
with wrinkles scattered around his eyes when he smiles,
with his head full of complex numbers,
causal connections,
details of precise accuracy

Do you take this man
to be quiet with him more often than talk,
this silence being more valuable than any conversation

Do you take this man
to burst into all-night diners,
to peel an apple and touch a delicate vinyl record with two hands and two hands,
to wrap your legs around him as if around a tree trunk,
to part as butter beneath a knife,
to revolve around your axis lighting his way

Do you promise
to insert and take out needles,
to rip off and put on bandages,
to smooth over conflicts,
to not pour too much milk into his coffee,
to withstand unbearably long pauses
when he turns his back;
to kiss as greedily as if choking on water on a hot day

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Do you take this woman
with her maladjusted mechanics,

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concealed scars,
with her collection of hearts in the pockets of her dress,
with her pile of errands that never gets smaller,
with her dyslexia, holes in her memory, her bitten lip,
with her big purse that holds random items and a lot of freedom

Do you take this woman
without reading her poems,
without reprimanding her,

to get angry with her but chase her fears away,
to revel in the faults that her perfection is made of,
to preserve your day's plan when you're together

Do you promise
to tiptoe around when she's bringing her ideas to life,
to come as a peacemaker to her hot spots,
to stray from the right path with her,
to enter into arguments and philosophical disputes
while never stopping to grow into each other —
in a rented Soviet-era apartment
and on a crowded local train
and in the attic of your parents' house
and in your own home with large windows and white walls
and in a hospital ward filled with desperation and hope
and in a hotel room where the sea replaces the floor

until nothing do you part

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HATCHING

The knight of eggshells, my unmistakable copy
in a modern remix, processed by time and space—
where did you get so much courage, moving non-stop
along this stunning journey towards adulthood?

The green pea curls, biting into the fence,
getting angry, bending old and creaky weeds.
Who would dare trim you with the "you-cannot" scissors,
or straighten you up with the "you-must" planks?

The flag bearer of an autumn park, the golden impostor,
look, fallen leaves are exploding in strikes above our heads.
Your house of sticks is standing strong, will not fall apart.
If you want to cry, then cry, the time will come to be a warrior.

You pierce right through with your eyes full of horizon.
The night approaches, so only the closest ones remain near.
The shell breaks—somewhere in the zone of twilight
basilisks hatch. The face changes in the mirror.

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THE SPARTAN BOY

The war that you've been carrying
in your shirt pocket
gnawed a hole in you as if it were a fox cub.
Your heart keeps falling out.
I sew the hole shut,
firmly holding the edges together
with my numb, unbending fingers.
I hope it stays closed a little longer.

When the city falls asleep,
the black caterpillars of scars wake up.
But only death's head moths will emerge.
The city pours steam out of its nostrils
and sets its hills like horns.
You have a vision of your mates' faces
at the bottom of the lake—
a dark fairy tale from your childhood that came true.
Although you were polite, respected elders, and were easily content.
Actually, there is no such thing as justice.
The scratched steel mug you never part with,
your superficial sleep, and fierce hatred of fireworks.
What a lucky one, he could have lost so much more,
he's almost whole, they say.
You have chosen me because of my skillful, sensitive fingers.
I'm comfortable holding a needle with them.

The fox is peering out of your pocket,
licking its lips, recalling what my bird of peace tasted like.

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THE AUGUST STORY

If their history together hadn't begun this way,
they both would have been left alone, each with their war.
August—hellish, the bathhouse filled with bodies.
She squeezes the familiar hand and comes to life again.
Everything that has happened and didn't happen to them,
is established, set in stone, unforgettable,
a pattern that appears on skin, in dreams,
mixed with reality, it interferes with being your true self
in the here and now, with taking a full breath of air.
The leaves have begun to yellow. He jokes awkwardly:
we won't have the chance to drink in this poison—
the scents of summer markets, exploits made in the sun,
the touch of shoulders and knees, bare and tanned,
the light that in a thin white beam, breaks through pain,
the feeling that this is the only moment that you'll have
to finish a sentence, to embrace more tightly.
A black shadow separates and lies on the roadside.
The suppressed cries will become crows
that crumble in the sky.
If you decide to tell me what is going on,
I'll listen—so I beg you, explain.

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A DECADE-LONG RIDE

Traveling for a decade towards each other.
We've each worn our own pair of iron boots.
Take me to church: the rain is banging on the windshield.
One-third of our lives passed. What if we never believed?
The chapel in the valley with a red flower, a bell tower,
Like the skirt of one of the dolls that we used to make
when we were kids, from anything close at hand:
the hair from corn silk.
Mallows stood flowerless by the fence.
The sunflower, caressing the sun earlier with its black cheek,
lowers its head, weighed down by seeds.
Wet, clipped fields are like rebellious girls.
Morning: the steaming lakes, sheep scattered throughout the field.
Our eyes are so hungry as if they had just learned to see.
Don't deny them until you get every single detail.
I am wind that got caught in a striped stocking,
causing it to flap,
fooling itself into thinking that it's a dance.

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A SOLDIER IS BORN

Bullets of rain hit the roof,
hit me in the gut:
what are you dreaming of,
poet of the warm home front?
The storm is wailing for them,
mourning them,
quietly
life went out
as if a feather has flown away

Fingers break bread,
put an enemy through the wringer
Laying down, he awaits
the coming that will never be

Memorial candles
lined up along the road again
Black ribbons like leeches feed at the flags

A rosary of beans picked by grandma
His father's warm socks made of scratchy wool
With all of this,
with his body,
he will knead the new clay
With his mouth,
he will scoop water from a leaky boat

Who are you,
the one with a glance that hurts
more than a rod,
a newborn
or confined to a uniform

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An inconspicuous
metal toy figurine
fell off the table,
punched a hole in the earth's crust

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HOME

I've planted a home for myself in a red flowerpot.
A place from which I never want to run.
A word that melts in my mouth when I say it.
A starting point that is marked on every map.
A home embraced by trees, branches covering the door.
Fantastic beasts wander, pressing against our knees.
How did we manage to imagine something so valuable
and everlasting in this fragile reality?
A clamorous galaxy. A castle bandaged by mist.
A dimension with an ongoing quest for the right words.
How would we recognize each other under the gloomy sky,
each of us pretending to be somebody else?
Look how our hands and hearts are bruised—
understandable when you must dig yourself out every day.
On this earth, a territory of despair, it is hard
to stop running even when no one is chasing you.
Here, we turn on the light above the dinner table.
Like a curious neighbor, the mistletoe peeks into our dreams.
A train, rumbling afar. A TV tower, like a white fang.
This is your stop. Exhale and then inhale, again.

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PERHAPS YOU DIDN'T

This will never happen to me,
she says, ironing her dress, white like a blank page.
All these women—each has her own truth.
Perhaps they prayed carelessly, couldn't keep the hearth,
didn't put a mandragora root under their bed,
perhaps they just couldn't manage it.

It's just me imagining, I mustn't take it to heart,
she ponders, sweeping the floor scattered with broken dishes,
her certainty, suddenly so fragile.
My loved one—it's not so easy for him,
my loved one has troubles at work,
my loved one's mood is ruined,
my loved one struggles with an untamed hunger,
the search for an easy target—
a stuffed doll with round button eyes.

You were busy making yourself beautiful,
neglecting housework.
Perhaps you weren't considerate enough,
grew yourself a crown; perhaps you have gone too far,
Swayed the foundation of this cozy world.

A neighbor's baby is crying behind the wall,
reminding you of what is crucial.
Annoyingly, only minutes of tardiness are being born.
Don't air your dirty linen in public,
don't talk of nasty things at the table,
on Sunday morning, on a hard day's night, on holiday or at lent.

When she comes to me with her swollen lip,
with a carefully masked blue bird on her temple,
I don't tell her: perhaps you didn't. Instead, for the both of us

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I tell her: turn the page, darling, just turn the page.

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THE GOD OF SUBMISSION

The god of submission loves gentle calves.
Warm, supple flesh is intoxicating.
The whip falls, a flower blooms beneath it.
Those that haven't been wriggling, hurt less.
The god of submission loves gentle calves.

The god of submission loves gentle calves.
Fresh straw and water in a trough for a calf,
simply believe and stop shooting back.
Only the godless sleep with one eye unshut.
The god of submission loves gentle calves.

The god of submission loves gentle calves.
The god of submission asks for bloody sacrifice,
being tightly bound is still better than dead.
Those singing out of the tune will be slaughtered first.
The god of submission loves gentle calves.

The god of submission loves gentle calves.
Bells on their necks ring loud like cathedral's.
Metal rings pierced their nostrils, mercilessly.
Mother cows smell good, but are forbidden to feed.
The god of submission loves gentle calves.

The god of submission loves gentle calves.
They can be spread like honey and put on a wound.
They will be watching and chewing diligently,
in the grass where a soldier is dying.
The god of submission loves gentle calves.