

Albana SHALA

Poems

Instead of a tree

We share an inner garden
into which we gaze from the edge
discreetly.

An inner garden,
with untouched colours,
with nameless trees,
with cats we don't dare feed,
with grass we never cut.

Until the day
the gale toppled
the biggest tree in our garden.
A yellow flower burial.

Tears roll down.
We can cry now.
We can name the other trees.

Still from a distance,
we can stare at the fallen trunk
visited by the cats
who take turns
to sit on top
with no need to cling,
with no need to climb.

The view is open.

Survivors

I am surrounded by survivors
with beautiful hands and hair
swinging
tall
half - full bottles
whom death revisits
after having already knocked them out
in a friendly match.

I hide,
entangled in your hair,
breathing slowly,
chin over chest,
my neck exposed,
listening to the steps,
the laughter, the spinning.

You don't need to explain.
I understand.

The tree has only one branch,
the one you sit on.
The river has only one bank,
the one you stand on.
The road has only one pavement,
the one you walk on.

I kiss you all
in your uncorked mouths
which enjoy food so much.

I buy you dancing shoes.
Yours is the floor.

I let myself float,
pretending I have learned the rules,
smiling
wisely.

Java island, Amsterdam 2009

We live on an island
with a borrowed name.

Two powerful young bridges
connect us to the sleepless town.

The first rays of the sun warm up the people
flocking to the bus station.

The morning wind wakes up the water,
the masts of the boats tremble gently.

A transatlantic behemoth
turns slowly and heads towards the sea.

Its horn blows twice.
The sharp-eyed seagulls dive,
lightning in the ship's wake, catching the fish
that survived the night.

On deck
peaceful men and curious women
view with binoculars our sights.

One bag, a pair of shoes, a cup of milk,
wet hair dripping,
thin legs keeping to an inner rhythm
little hands moving restlessly.
A boy.

You look through the window at the water
I watch behind you unarmed
as my gaze meets the behemoth's.
The visitors wave us goodbye.

So many impressions
will be chewed over breakfast.
You are tired and pleased,
director of this golden and unambiguous dawn.
Life as fact.

Dancing to Bach

November is ending
daylight is thinning
grey matter thickens
as in a perfect MRI

We blow candles together
and dance to Bach everyday
of your birth week

Time stretches like a cat
dozes off near the fire
one paw suspended
Before it falls on the blanket
I hold for both of us
the order of the songs of the day
the order of the films watched on YouTube
the cut of the banana slice
hidden between a piece of kiwi
and a strawberry
the white handled fork
your short red vest
your absent profile
your legs crossed
your cooing

All so simple and so complicated
like the knots of the ribbons
you like to wave

Time purrs and dreams
playing with you
one unintentional scratch on your cheek
the only evidence of the game

Coffee grounds

In a single act,
I am toppled over
like a coffee cup
locking in a piece of life,
which does not match
with the news of the day.

As the coffee grounds slide
A fatal frieze emerges.
Chamber music plays.

Any effort to undo these acts
will fail.
Life has to take its leisurely stroll
before it surrenders me
in a pram
to the next judge.

In the Caucasus

In the Caucasus it happens that you do not see mountains
they have been stolen in the night
now they rise on a neighbour's land.

In the Caucasus, the human rights activists play tamada.
make a toast to the women and to peace.
None of them is self impregnable.

In the Caucasus, it happens that you shake hands with an ex-KGB,
who talks amiably about civil society and democracy.
He represents the rebel Ossetian minority.

In the Caucasus, it happens that you sleep in the same hotel
with the nephews of the thousands deported by Stalin,
like cattle, to far away Asia.
They are brought to see the land of their forefathers by German philanthropists.

In the Caucasus, a professor of sociology with liquid eyes,
respectfully listens to the toastmaster and whispers softly in my ear:
'We will drink again tonight... C'est la vie.'

In the Caucasus, they recommend you read Alexandre Dumas
"Le Caucase" written 150 years ago,
to understand the present.

In the Caucasus, everything is relative
except the petrol haemorrhage
In which absolute the old blessing and curse are mixed.

The bone

I woke up this morning to understand
that I had dreamed about my bone once again in contention,
in colour.

I dragged myself from cellar to attic
pretending not to know where and when I buried it
the last time.

I do not worship my bone
but I cannot trade it for anything.
One's bone has no price.

I am not prepared to offer it either.
It is part and parcel
of the old pack.

Small hours

I am listening to her voice
wrapped in apple skin

the boats start floating on the Amstel
in the armpit of the open bridges
sleepy doves knitted in filigree

it's a small hours classic.

Digital Pope

Let us choose another pope

A pope
we will never doubt
if he gazes with amusement at the nuns
if he dreams of getting under the covers with cardinal X
if he has betrayed the fatherland or his best friend
fifty years ago.

Let us choose once and for all
a pope with the latest software
trustworthy
reliable
rechargeable
painless

A digital Pope.

Blue socks

Let me slide
through the darkness,
the cold air,
the shiny lamps,
the icy platform,
with red nose and frozen thoughts.

Let me be free of the words
the many words,
of the rhymes,
of the habits of poets,
of the smoke,
of the softness of wine,
of the foaminess of beer,
the dripping,
the clicking,
the ticking,
the mocking.

I am gone.
I am on my way back
to the doorstep,
where two white feet greet me sleepily,
in blue socks,
each with a letter on top.

KOSOVO 1999

On the menu of The Two Roberts
the Russian salad has been baptised French
both lack vegetables and mayonnaise.
Today the French took Mitrovica and the Russians the airport

Young guys
from the villages
make way for me at the bar
of the first disco club in town
since the war

Black leather coats
smoked in burning houses
even tonight will not hung behind doors.

'Waiter! Let us celebrate the victory!'
On the drinks board is scribbled in chalk:
'We prepare Molotov cocktails'

Map of atavistic desires

Let me go under your soft skin

Ease the burn in your heart,

filter your breath,

dance in your veins

sit in your brain,

hammer your DNA chain,

implant your wisdom teeth

scrub the dead skin from knee, elbow, heel, soul

open all your dikes and flatten your dams

shake up all the liquids of your body,

and with this cocktail

impregnate myself again,

before the darkness falls into my eyes.

My blacksmith

Each time you come and go
your hammer breaks through the reptilian links of my spine

from underneath whispers beam upright into leaves
their fragile necks stubbornly refuse to be dried
into commodities.

Awakening

Crumbs in the bed,
invited to inspect the battlefield.

Archaeopteryx

They say he was an archaeopteryx
with heavy pockets
full of coffee beans
credit cards
unanswered calls
Sunday *El País*
and levi jeans

They say she was an archaeopteryx too
with heavy socks
full of lost bikes
unpaid bills
dried flowers in unread books
long showers
bread and cheese.

They saw a small round head in her front pocket as well

What they listened to
was their wings' cry.

What they will listen to next
has not yet been decoded.

Words

Words have left me
like the passengers of the first class left the Titanic.

In small lifeboats the names and verbs depart: “love” “trust me”
On deck the pronouns remained stoical
So too the adverbs, the exclamations: “Mine!” “Forever!”
In the hold the conjunctions bang furiously on closed doors: “if”, “whether”

In the distance a firework dies out like a sigh.
The water gurgles.

Measuring time

Shkodër, 2004

I unleash the day
like a dog in the garden

When I call him
he approaches me with lowered head
waging his tail.

And he waits patiently.
While the water absorbs the sugar
the bread soaks up the water
and the clay pot is assured again
that it is nothing more
than water, bread and sugar.