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Poet Signature

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POET SIGNATURE

Artur Lundkvist

SAGA OF A SHE

She saw women washing by a lake with boiling water.
They moved about in the steam with their great red arms,
And behind them the heavens were white with hung wash.

She saw two lovers lying in the grass by a cliff.
The earth began to crumble, the ground gave way,
but the lovers sailed off on an isle of green.

She saw a dog drinking from a pool full of stars.
The stars disappeared one after another: lapped up by a dog.
And the hound spoke and said: I suffer from melancholy.

She sat together with many women against a wall.
The sun gilded their up-turned faces like masks.
When they began to caress her she changed into a man.

She looked in through a window where people were dancing
naked in the firelight, shameless women with spilt hair
and heavy swinging breasts like sacks of wheatflour.

She met a bull in the woods and fled round a tree
till it tangled its arched horns in the branchwork
and looked helplessly up at her like a child.

THERE IS A CITY

There is a city by the sea, white and towered.
Windows flash there to the sound of morning's trumpets.

Uniforms and morning coats embrace each other.
The barrack walls are worn as the plush of bordellos.

The rocking chapel stuns itself with bell-ringing
Birds fly like white spirits in the circles of sound.

Night's moisture lingers on the slabs of cafe tables
Drinks scream like caged birds, green, red, yellow.

The dice are yellow from nicotine fingers
and their worn out eyes are blind to each chance.

Spent droskies wing by on crooked wheels
Cabs that spew up their contents like intestines.

Indolence leers in warped mirrors with quivering chins,
but industry rings in the factories like a silver coin.

POEM

Your glances lash the water like tentacles.
Serpents of sun fly into the night of your armpits.
You open a bird's blue breast and pull it
over your head in pride and melancholy.

The bucket can be heard scraping the walls of
your sorrow's well. Oh city of memory with your crystal turrets
and rotten boards, your piles in the earth and flesh!

The lash cut stripes on the frost-covered boots.
 Doves idled on the harnesses' black lyres. The beggar
 slept in his green, icicled beard, or poisoned himself
 with copper coin. And the backstairs Venus stole by
 with a brandy flask between her breasts.

Minstrels

dreamed behind eyelids heavy as tropical birds,
 with brows like the spiders' white egg pouches,
 pregnant with songs and unhatched revolutions.

Satin shoes danced recklessly on broken glass.
 Knife shafts burned like torches through the long night.
 Fur flashed on contact with naked skin
 and sprang to life as if around animals.

Morning came

with the broken comb left in the bed.

NO LINE IS POSSIBLE IN ANY LIFE

You are not at home with strength or weakness.—
 You believe in neither the flower's labor nor the thought's
 innocence.

No line is possible in any life. The arabesque's
 mysterious copse is the colophon of all aspiring.

Woman's bite in your shoulder is no seal
 upon your love. But what rests on what
 in the perilous tower disappearing in fog
 its eagles sensing neither depth nor height?

The human is all web and membrane.
 You must wean yourself away and open
 a spring to the inhuman, the hard conditions
 that leave no leaf to gather one's tears in.

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ARTUR LUNDKVIST

But observing the economy of the inexorable
you renounce usual objects of rejoicing, servile
placating solace, and bend your resources
to breaking fresh paths and seeking new seas.

The evening sun coats its ripe honey-light
under slate-blue skies, and scattered life
is gathered in the poet's hands, filling its form,
the golden image which becomes the lie of a new day.

The women who have already cast their children in the river
and the maternal salt pillars who are through crying
now gather at their feet the seafoam of the days
and the man of smoke drags his shadow across the field.

Angels and demons plunge whistling out of space
and change masks in the eddies of battle.
Human dwellings are consumed in lilies of pure fire
and water is flung from fountains in silver cascades.

But some with seashell, shark's tooth, or knife
are carving in wood and ivory; time floats the shavings away
and from these images a murmur arises
of the shipwreck of desire on impossibility's shore.

THE ART OF GROWING OLD

I

Entangled
in life's entrails and daily skeins of barbed wire
without root in the earth or wing in the clouds
I return to that which I flee
without knowing what is a tent of heaven
or a hitching post in myself
without knowing what is only dust
or what was once a flower.

The trucks of morning roll headlong on
over the lamps of night, straw and champagne,
marriage implicates itself in burials,
coins sweat under the ardor of hands,
warm oil flows over snowy alabaster
and flames are caught in bottles
like dead snakes in bottles.

I travel on a motionless river,
a black and speechless violin
which someone plays with his naked feet,
but the shores keep on changing, keep moving by
meaningless
as house construction and conflagration,
as the planting and felling of trees,
as hearth and ashes.

The children newly born
already fondle one another in the stacked timber,
the young couple sinks into the community of fat
among the water mirrors of the evident
where they roll their future before them on wheels,
the wonderwork of repetition which rolls
over a carpet of bird eggs and broken feet.

The mills, the mills grind seed and glass
between the daily walls of flesh
under smoky trees and quivering lanterns.
Swallows approach with small gold crosses in their beaks,
rain strikes me in the face
refreshingly contemptuous.

II

I flee my ocean depth with drowned lanterns
and flowers that will drink no more than moonlight.
The quiet work continues day and night,
about me, within me,

in living tree, in dead wood,
in metals that think themselves hard,
in my own frightened flesh.

There are a thousand rotating diamond bits,
the focal points of inner suns, centrifuges
that drain the ocean of the heart,
innumerable small knives and saws
in the landscape of bleeding fabrics.
It is the coral that spreads,
the coral city's stiffened sunset in the blood,
it is the tiger's soundless tread
and a little smoke shut up in seedpods.

But I have a green window with buzzing flies,
I have an ice window with frozen clods of earth,
behind it my head lies in a bed of crystals,
I have a snowdrift with violet eyelashes
and the freckled flowers of bird flocks against the sky,
I have hereditary hopes in the linden shades
with roots bored into the fat, black earth,
a tree shaking with buried machinery
with a constellation glistening in its crown.

Yet I am no more than neighbor to myself,
I never see me,
only suspect that someone lives on the other side of the wall,
someone waging naked battle with a nettle,
in a smell of clothes that have lain long upon the ground.

III

The days burn without oblation or mourners.
My god is mine, sculptured in wishes and denials,
a brain of clotted diamonds
and a crucible heart which burns in the night,
a crystal sword bursting into peals at every stroke,
a grotto in a living body,
an organ where molten metals rise and fall,
quite encircled by that measuring tape which

spins from my mouth, in a vigil
that waits in blindness, in an alley of statues
whose eyes are consumed by expectation,
among the maimed with their bleeding feet.

The sun sinks daily into this that much riper wall
where faces darken like umbrellas in the rain,
but like the branch in the wood
I put up resistance to the cleaving axe,
still sullen and flaming
its limbs grown into the trunk,
lit by the blazing strawfire of a late love
where I quiver like a chandelier beneath a dancehall floor.

Desire rests like a spear among the roses,
in a winter echo of drums and sleeping snow.
The storm opens a still wider glade about me,
only fallen trees, fallen trees everywhere!
I see the hermit whip himself with juniper yet green,
he has a hand in the nectary
and a foot in the sinking water,
scarcely a lightning rod
but prepared for the ire of space.

Translations by Richard B. Vowles