A SELECTION OF POEMS

taken from *Finse meisjes*, Podium 2012 and *De zee heeft honger*, Podium 2018

by

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2020
Nobody exists on purpose,
nobody belongs anywhere,
everybody’s going to die,
come watch TV

Rick and Morty
NOCTURNAL ANIMALS

I ironed out the creases in my legs
lived with you
like a heartbeat

if we didn’t set the bar too high
we were reasonably happy
we ate carrots every other day to stay healthy
compensating for the lack of daylight

when everyone was asleep you got out Dostoyevsky and whisky

at night in a tiny bathroom we developed photographs
on our knees, as though saying a prayer
the images gave you exactly enough distance
to be able to care for people
INCANTATION

When the stewardess says that we must first
put on our masks before we—
a man laughs, his chapped skin bursts

in the blink of an eye he pulls a knife from his boot
presses it against the man in the next seat’s cheek

in his suitcase:
unread letters, a pill for loneliness
and a prayer for fear

it rarely goes wrong, the stewardess says
breastfeeding mothers don’t wear bomb belts
trees wave whichever direction you come from
THE SEA IS HUNGRY

If you want to know where people wait
you need to look for the cigarette butts
on the beach
tiny dreams like folded-up notes

waiting is like the sea
time comes towards us
but can also turn away from us
like an extended drought

thirst is so great we can’t name it
we can’t drink salt water
no one knows how long the sea sleeps
her thighs are always cold and willing

we take with us everything we own
below us swim children without hunger
most of all we wish we could go back to the moment
before everything began to falter

when waiting still meant dreaming and
the sea wasn’t hungry
WE DECIDE TO LEAVE

1

Sometimes it seems like I have the wind in my back
the dead helping me move forwards
I stare at people who stand close by
as though they might disappear
when I blink my eyes

I want things to stick to me

2

Is happiness disappearing or rather being found
I don’t have the answer I shout
Sand begins to shift itself like an old camel

no person has ever been able to turn the sea

3

I need something that will make me lighter
from above everything always seems like it wants to go up
the crowd becomes an animal panting heavily

we decide to leave
but keep abandoning this by turns
REPETITION

Only those with striking names win here
there are places the sun never reaches
people live there too
gnawing at the skeleton of the city

you can take exactly the same
route every day
squeeze into tiny spaces
stand close to someone to catch their scent
have sex with the same person
set off an alarm
push someone into a metro
club animals
dance until your muscles ache
scratch until you bleed
ignore a tramp
be under the influence
find someone who is lonelier than you
walk into a room where an illegal abortion has taken place

smell the loss

have sex with someone else

without anyone realizing who you are
FURRY ANIMALS

Animals move around the city in coats
sometimes they greet each other like old friends
who don’t know what to do with themselves
‘Mustn’t grumble,’ the rabbit says to the racoon
‘and I never get tired’

as death clings to me I keep spirits up

and walk from murder scene
to murder scene
I watch on tv as
someone points a gun at the cameraman

keep on watching until the last light has gone from the room
discover a trail of blood dripping from the fur
and trickling down my neck
INSOMNIA

We don’t know what to do with this amount of light
itching away under our skin
dogs are wreaking havoc
igniting each other like fire and
will be the first to break into a run
during the day I look for places to sleep
someone always loses between sleeping and waking

while I should have been somewhere else
with a different lover on the other side of the moon
I used to go to the animal shelter quite often
barking looked like rays of light through the bars
the longing to be put on a lead

what depressed me even more
were the women casually coming off their sunbeds
close to breaking under their skin
a sickly feeling of shame welled up

I also watched the way mothers who weren’t my own
waited for their daughters
Laika who was sent into space and never came back
SHE’S NOT MY MUM BUT WAVES

A woman with reddish hair
and a black skirt walks through the park
she is not my mum but waves

sometimes I’d go into town
maybe she’d be walking around in a crowd
wearing high heels
an anxious heron
the air freezing around her

I looked and looked until nobody was left

maybe she was crying
maybe she was happy
Finnish girls rarely say hello
but aren’t arrogant or shy
you only need a chisel to get a little closer
they order their own beer
can travel the world
while their husbands wait at home
if they’re angry they send you a rotten fish

They hibernate on a bench under the snow
When spring comes they get drunk
to scratch the layer of civilization from their skin
they hang around in bus shelters
and sometimes naked in lakes

In the night bus they sink their teeth into the rubber armrests
If they haven’t already fallen asleep
FAMILY

After this I’ll stop drinking on weekdays I said
and asked random old men
at the bottom of escalators whether they were my grandad
one of them said he was sorry

When I found him we walked through the city
wanting everyone to see I had a grandad
he marched along the street, his back straight
the war still in his limbs

I thought about the man who had died between us
the way his time ran down on the chess clock
the way my grandad fed him sambal as punishment

The letter my dad wrote and never sent
On the last day someone comes to play chess
you ask who put a dead horse in your bed
the man facing you doesn’t know whether to let you win

In the kitchen we throw buckets of water
until it’s up to our ankles
Your wet hair sticks to your neck, your head to our hands
When you do the shopping you always drink a can of coke
supermarkets make you thirsty
satisfied you put the can back on the shelf

The day you left we ate spaghetti
We sat on the balcony, plates on our laps
heat brewed, the air felt empty
I climbed into a strange bed
pulled up my knees and slept all summer.
WASH DAYS

Sometimes when you go to the launderette feeling a bit rough
the machines labouring away for you
driving odours from clothing
promising perfect days

Someone whistles a tune and briefly
glances at you and before you know it
you’re both in a flamenco bar
giving each other desperate looks
you ask whether the weather will be nice tomorrow
and where the wash has got to

When we part you say
you no longer do the washing on Saturdays
and that from now on we’ll take turns
WE ARE

The most attractive men eat their steaks raw
even a vegetarian knows that I said when I’d met you
and put a note under your steak: ‘I don’t have an issue with blood’

We spend the tip even before we get home
I chuck the coins in a pinball machine, but however much money I put in
nothing at all happens – you use the tip to
impress women who smell of toilet duck

You gesture for me to sit on your lap
I pull the thread from between your teeth and feel the promise
that we can become something not one has managed to be before

At night we take turns to stay awake
watching over something that has no clear shape
a chunk of meat in a towel
that shrinks whenever you touch it

You say that everything changes with time, even houses, our house
and that if there’s any good moment to die
this might be it
LOVE LETTER

I licked plates clean
And watched rain pull sadness from the sky

Someone asked whether he could put ten perch in my fridge
it’s smelled of fish here ever since
water drips from his chin

I asked if he could deal with the washing up
And said that sometimes I had curls and sometimes I was a firewoman
I would wave from the fire engine, even if houses were burning to the ground

at night I cycled without lights
but I can do anything by just feeling
even the strangest things

When I saw someone who looked just like you
I wanted to press my lips to his
slice his heart from his chest
and keep it in a fishbowl
He lies in bed wearing yesterday’s socks
pale blue advertising brochures with palm trees
girls in bikinis pile up
between meat ads
we all look like mincemeat on the inside

Outside the world is tidier
rays of light puff up the dust
the city wriggles into the house

Then he calls a mother
because he wants to sleep with her
he remembers pictures of her in a bikini
before she gave birth to three kids

She talks about birthdays
he nods without replying
walks to the balcony
feels the first slap of autumn
SRI LANKA

You can’t ignore anything you can only just squeeze through –
the bus drivers here think
white chalk shows the places you can die inside

during the hottest part of the day you can roll up
the way a horse bends his legs on a roadside
until it disappears in the sand

a person is a friend if he
stays after you’ve paid in advance
there are different ways of seeing a city
one of them is vomiting in a rickshaw

if there’s a place where you can step off the world
it is here
hands behind your back, eyes shut

when the sea stretches out you can touch everything from the balcony
men who drag bodies from the water never eat meat again
He likes light things
He likes a bird in his hands
He likes to hold something in his hands that is smaller than himself
He’d prefer to hold something in his hand that might break
not wristwatches or files
He likes to hold something in his hands that will break
A sister’s dolls, the knobs on the gas stove
He likes to hold something in his thoughts that might break
emptiness that snaps in half at daybreak
He looks for a place where he won’t be found
He likes to hold something in his hands that won’t break
but that stays hidden under his skin
He watches as feathers become a ball between his fingers
He likes to hold something in his hands that might break

Most things break extremely slowly
When my mouth is stuck to the inside of my jumper
when I wake up
I know something has gone really wrong

I try to go back to sleep due to lack of coffee
and dream a bed

with most things we intervene too late
maybe we run a couple of minutes behind on everything

look at yourself in the mirror and
know that if you don’t go home now you will
break something

if I get hungry I can’t point to where the hunger is
I blink my eyes
look for my hands

bedsores keep me hidden
I don’t need to know anyone outside of these premises
WHO WILL TAKE THE LIGHT WITH THEM

1
In the winter Finnish people sit under an energy-saving bulb
generations have been raised like this
they didn’t exactly shoot up but did get thick skins
in every bathroom cabinet there’s a weapon against darkness
(the pharmacist is obliging)

2
Children steal liqueur chocolates from the tree
Father Christmas is late this year, his breath stinks
of strong cleaning products
he blames his reindeer
while outside days
grow thinner
branch by
branch

3
Father Christmas likes to keep things to himself
the world used to be so big sometimes he didn’t see
anyone for weeks and weeks

When light finally presses itself through the sky
he sees people emerging from the snow
like drunken statues
they hit each other with branches, cry onto each other’s shoulders
A dull thud every time it hits the glass
a moth has been trying for hours to get out

when did I last want something so desperately
I would damage myself for it

I do know the longing that gives you
cram in your groin

sometimes I see the things I want
as a tidal wave that can cover the land
to get there first I have to drown
If it rains on a Sunday
it rains differently at our house than anywhere else
the air is drier and the cat won’t let you stroke it

We used to have a peephole in the fence
behind it was where things happened

From the back garden you can see the dirty dishes piling up
which is the distance between lovers
when they don’t touch

Intimacy is finding out that you are staring
at the same spot as the other person
like at my parents
whitewashing the walls for the hundredth time
HANOI

In a cheap hotel where the walls move along with you
cats stare feverishly out of their eyes
they rub against the guests to make them stay longer
it’s always others who bring the cold inside with them

a young man who doesn’t leave his room
thinks that the world is running out of his fingers
fields drift by
he’s been lying like that for twenty-one days
he dreams of cutting himself out of photographs
in a country where the sky is black and opium comes cheap
WHAT PAIN LOOKS LIKE

1

My dad has a new girlfriend
an African kickboxer with spiky hair
she shows me how strong she is
by bending the door handle with one hand

I’m impressed
note the muscles rolling in her neck
you could call this a situation

when she’s taking a shower
I want to show her my newly-washed guinea pig
she says I should leave her alone
that it’s just an excuse to see her naked

the last time she came to ours
she took my dad’s metallic Sony Walkman

2

I wander around with the girl next door
looking for dead animals to put in our garden
two guinea pigs
some goldfish
butterflies
a rat
my dad says it’s our last pet

he thinks there are secret meetings
in which people discuss UFOs

if you tune in the radio between two stations
you can sometimes catch snatches of conversation

3
My neighbour’s mum hands out leaflets on the square until it gets dark the hope that someone will return keeps her going after that she goes to the snack bar and treats us to deep fried hotdogs and hooks up with an Egyptian God is in your deep fat fryer, she says it’s that winter when I find out what pain looks like I only have to look out the window snow dampens all sound erasing all the traces
A man points at the inside of his mouth
as though aiming a gun at his palate
we give him a cigarette
night cuts the angles from his face

people disappear in this country
turning up again in unexpected places
like the beggar without any legs
who appears wherever we go

the wallpaper makes strange noises
at night letters containing marriage proposals
are shoved under my door

they say there’s a forest here where it’s so quiet
you can’t go beyond a certain point
birds, snakes and people turn back
It interests you, the way I move
in this city lacking in birds
the view is constant pandemonium
people pushing forward
as though picking up a prize

I can see where you’ve been hit
you say, ‘I can be somebody here’
as you point a bow and arrow out of the window

we sleep pits in old mattresses along the way
shed our skins time after time while
somewhere an alarm clock rings incessantly
I squeeze between ribs and
survive thanks to others’ generosity
moving from body to body
like a disease slowly spreading
I am inside your limbs
and will never let go

If only I could sleep like an animal
deep and yet prepared