

A SELECTION OF POEMS

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

by

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*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

[untitled]

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

[untitled]

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  
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

[untitled]

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

[untitled]

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

[untitled]

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

[untitled]

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

[untitled]

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

cramp 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

[untitled]

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

## INDIA

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

[untitled]

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

[untitled]

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