



A Path to the Sea

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1.

Celebration in the Season of Nettles

It's Not a Good Time for Poets

The despair of my open hand
at the corner of my lips—
the tremor of my voice when I ask
in the Cibin market in Sibiu
for a kilo of cherries—these
are the fierce masks behind which I preserve myself
during days when another poet advises:

“Transform yourself into
something else, even a dragon. Forget
for a while you're a poet. It won't do
you any good. Can even
destroy you.”

And I—who stubbornly continue to write poems,
to cull, to retrieve my youth
from photographs—gather lavender, stalk
by stalk, and spread it on my dead father's desk.
As if life were just going on,
comforting and gentle, imaginable.
As if my flesh were, yes,
what it is: a fountain of stars.

Celebration in the Season of Nettles

I haven't written any poems.

Not about the tribe of nettles and their uses,
nor about the cherry blossoms.

Winter felt endless
and my skittery sleep, like a startled rabbit
pursued by too many hunters, shook the dark.

There's little news:
the daffodils herald a fanfare of gold
in the monastery garden, and
Cati's old aunt was picked up by the wind
while hanging her patched blouses in the yard.

She's all right now.

She reads her favorite psalms in the glow
of her small table lamp, its backlit shade
a collage of half-century-old news clippings,
her photograph at twenty
when she was crowned *Miss Romania*.

Another Saturday night and fireworks sparkle like a tiara
in the quiet March sky. Who knows
what the guests at the Marriott might be celebrating?

As for me: my first poem
after an interminable winter.

Strolling Between Millennia

The young man proceeds serenely through the crowd
carrying a black violin case.

He strolls along the busy street,
a fair-haired young man in blue jeans and
leather jacket, as if he had appeared
out of the clear sky above a mountain
and not from the vertical abyss
of a ten-story apartment building.

The light sparkles shyly
on faces, on the brazen lindens,
on the miniature cross around the neck of a little boy
ripping crumbs from a heel of bread
to scatter for the birds.

From one window a Bach concerto,
from another the voice of the TV
reporting fresh bombardments
somewhere in the world.

The young man proceeds serenely through the crowd
carrying a black violin case.

This is how I imagine
an angel would pass among mortals.

He enters the apartment building, rises
to the sunny terrace on the roof above the tenth floor.

Among white linens drying on a red plastic clothesline,
he expertly clicks open the black case; how calmly
he assembles
the high-powered rifle.

Once Upon a Time in Venice

I dreamed I was in Venice.

I was twenty

and lightning was my brother.

On my scarf a hand from the sky

had painted curious signs.

My hair smelled of tangerines,

my breasts of almost ripe lemons.

I was living in a small hotel,

its name erased by thick fog.

At dawn, I'd wait for you on the embankment.

You were the merchant of pearls and myrrh.

Your lips had the taste of apples stored in hay,

your cheeks, the salt of tears mixed

with harbors and open seas.

You always arrived in May

after a year or two of absence, or three.

I always asked you the same thing:

“Where have you been these last two hours?”

The gondola on which you used to ferry me

was heaped with azaleas and freesias, alive with red

and blue birds; our bodies were drunk on love,

on the supreme sensuality of the stars.

You never spoke,

letting your voyages take the place of speech,

and even sometimes of life.

Whenever you sailed away, I'd go back

to my small Venetian room. I played chess

by myself, painted delicate scarves

with more and more complicated runes,

coordinates and alignments of the planets

calculated to bind us together again.
And every evening, in my small stove
of glazed white tiles, I burned
those long silk letters.

In the House where Hyacinths

bloom a second time, the snow
can no longer be heard against the window.
Nor the laughter of the mad king.
Olive trees are in flower in the Elysian Fields.
My silver hairpin
adorns other coils, the sheen
of other years.

Winter Impressions

At the wall licked clean by the snow's assiduous tongue
the soldier's tall boots stand sentry.

He himself has retreated into the Radio Building to get warm.

An unremarkable winter scene,

not in the least worthy of some modern Breughel's eye.

Nevertheless, here at the boundary between the necessary
and the useless, a cat has had her kittens

in one of the soldier's boots.

The small shapes—new eyes

still blind to winter, to the absence

around them—turn small pink mouths

toward the hot belly of the present.

The skein of life unwinds. Spatters of milk

flicked from their white whiskers

melt the ice, drop

by drop.

Return to Sibiu

After a year of absence

I find my house strewn with feathers.

From the paintings, what first disappeared
was the sea.

Only a fish's gasping mouth remained alive,
bubbling words.

Moon rays curled obediently
in my coffee cup
and an invisible bird measured invisible time
inside a clock where she'd built her nest.

"Georg," she whispered.

"Philipp," the echo sang back.

"Telemann," I say aloud
while the record is spinning
and violin strings
accompany your body
a world away.

Like an unseen orchestra:

Presto, say your fingers

Corsicana, answer my fingers

Allegrezza, say your eyes

Scherzo, answer mine

Gigue, say your patent-leather shoes

Polacca, answers my white dress

Menuet, answer our bodies, dancing in a ring
on the perfect Street of the Bards ...

The Silver of Our Moment

Ignorant, the snail crosses both good and evil,
the sensations of each, as it caresses earth,
sometimes warm and tempting, sometimes
cold, devoid of answers.

Its journeys embroider silver lace
on truths, half truths and lies—
a work of art
by such a slow, insignificant creature,
easily crushed
by the wickedness of the powerful,
by negligence or accident.

I watch it advance with the same sweet patience
it uses to carry itself
along blades of grass, the bent stems
of the pansies, through the perfume of May roses,
but also over pink granules of poison
scattered by people for creatures larger than it
and considered more harmful.

The sheen of silver left on
the poison
is as perfect, as bright as that
on the roses.

We adorn each sin
in the silver of our moment,
unaware of the angel
blushing, hastening to renew our path
with pansies, with sunbeams, with roses.

Messenger

What message do you have for me
and from whom, little bird,
almost fused to the bark of the walnut tree?

Only the blue-gray sky of your collar
reveals where you cling
to the ashes of time
in which I dress myself.

A small straw-thatched
window, moon-like, is lodged
in the fog-shrouded trunk,
and on it, if I gaze through—a book
written with a prayer.

Only one.

Oh, why have you come, bird,
to perch in His light
and sweep the ashes from my path,
turning it blue once more
and full of song?

Sometimes I am the ax
in the lonely woman's hand.
Sometimes the gnarled strawberry
beside her path

wild and sweet.

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