

## Marko Vešović: The Polish cavalry

### Daybreak

I'm doing sentry duty. At dawn. Nearby is a house. Actually,  
a yellowish hovel. Beside it – a poplar above a well.  
The poplar is as tall, it somehow seems to me, as  
the well is deep. Above the house white smoke is unfolding  
Like a baby's diapers.  
In the house a child is crying. Long. For years already.  
It seems: The shack would come down if the child fell silent.  
Anything can come to mind when one is  
Doing sentry duty.  
All of a sudden, a goldenheaded girl comes out of the house,  
She's about ten years old – twelve, at the most.  
Missing a leg. A gorgeous invalid. An angel on crutches.  
With a ruddy face, as if from the daybreak.  
And I started crying. From that ruddiness on her face.  
From that daybreak on crutches! All kinds of things  
can cross your mind when you are doing sentry duty.  
And the child's weeping seems never to stop. As if it had  
its own electric motor. The weeping which, it seems,  
will not cease, as long as this world exists. As long as there is  
a soul alive under these skies. A weeping that will  
resound through all eternities. For time, when you are a sentry,  
moves slowly like a glacier. When you are a sentry, your soul  
sometimes hears galloping messengers bringing the news  
that for a long time, under these skies, there's nothing.  
Not even you. On sentry duty.

## Signature

I'm running home with my little daughter –  
Again, shells have surprised us on the street.  
Shells have, for centuries, been falling every day,  
And every day they surprise us.  
I'm hurrying her on with angry words:  
Transferring my rage from the Serb gunners  
To a child awaited for ten years.  
*Let me write my name*, she tells me, as we were passing  
A patch of virgin snow in the park.  
Instead of scolding her,  
I – God knows why – let her forefinger  
Break the delicate whiteness  
And then, around the Cyrillic IVANA VEŠOVIĆ  
My forefinger described a circle  
Impenetrable

Like in fairy-tales.

## **This shooting**

This shooting has gotten into our blood. Without shooting  
(just like without your morning coffee) you can't get your day going.  
And do you remember how, at the start of the war, after a shell  
burst a hush would fall, like the deadly silence when someone  
in a bar blabbed something against Tito or the Party?  
Shells have now gotten into our bones. When there is a silence,  
you're as taut as a string. You keep thinking: My God, what are  
they fixing for us now? With that silence they only instill  
more fear into our bones. But as soon as a heavy  
machine gun makes itself heard, I loosen up right away,  
my wife begins making a pie, the kids start chattering around  
the house. They are shooting again-- everything's all right, then.  
Yesterday, back home from work, I asked: was there any shooting  
while I was gone? My youngest daughter told me:  
*You should have seen, Dad,*  
*how nicely two of them whizzed by.*

## **In the evening you lie down in bed**

and you know you are lying down in vain: tomorrow you will get up still more enervated than when you lay down. In the morning you get up from bed and you know that you are getting up in vain: yesterday's day is awaiting you, with yesterday's stress. With the humiliations of the day before yesterday. With the despair of the day before that. This siege has been going on not for two years but for a single day that has no end.

From this I could find rest, it seems to me,  
only by the sea. And who knows if we will ever see it again?  
Will I ever again be able to stand on those cliffs  
where the air currents are so strong they  
return the cap you threw?!

But I do not long, this time, for the sea with the fleshy  
leaves of agaves in which the names  
of love are carved. For the olive trees feverishly  
twisted like green laocoons. For the hats of jellyfish  
that look like silken tents from Oriental  
tales. I do not long for the monotony of waves which  
the poet compares to Homer's metrics. I do not long for that ink  
with which one could write billions and billions of  
*Iliads* and *Odysseys*.

I long for that sadness that  
comes over you when, looking at the eternal blueness  
you listen to the murmur of that eternity.  
For the sadness that tells you that you have a soul again.  
Maybe not even for that sadness, but I long for that  
Magnificent and balmy emptiness.

To plunge the soul into the emptiness that relaxes.  
That heals and rejuvenates. To stare for hours not even  
at the open seas, nor above the open seas, but – just so!  
The Bosnian way. Until you forget both what you are and where  
you are and where you're from and what your name is.  
The only thing you know is that within you are – miles  
and miles of emptiness. And that the sea's vastness has sucked  
Out of you all the centuries, all the way to Adam.  
The blue emptiness stretches to the end of the world and, backwards,  
to its beginning. And you grasp – actually, you don't grasp, you feel  
it on your palate: the sweetness that will take over after Judgment  
Day!  
Everything will be obliterated, like a child's scribble on a blackboard  
and only pure rapture will remain!  
So you taste ahead of time, albeit with a teaspoon only,  
The bliss the world will explode in!

## Girl's blouse

It's getting dark, and in the west someone's foot  
has knocked over a jug of wine, pouring it all over the horizon.  
The new moon looks like horns on a helmet in which,  
in films, Moses is shown. Pines smell  
*of lemons and incense*

A soldier, long and brittle like a rye stalk, is doing sentry duty.  
He's brittle with youth and love. Carefully he pulls out  
of his breast pocket a girl's white blouse. And he plunges  
his face in it. He drinks its scent for a long time. Those five  
or six grams of fabric he could pull through a wedding ring.

A sight divinely unutterable. Saying it in words  
would be like measuring the weight  
of a sun's ray on a scale.

Suddenly, from all this – from the wine-colored west  
from the new moon with horns, from the girl's blouse,  
whose scent can, like a thread, lead you out of hell—  
suddenly, from all this, I feel relieved in my soul.  
And in the world.

You know that war still exists  
on earth like a black ball of yarn. But the soul could  
play with it like a kitten. Death still shows through everything.  
Yet not like a skull showing through the skin of the face  
But like a seed through a grape: making it more magical.

Translated by Omer Hadžiselimović