

CARRYING MY ABYSS

after Adonis

It is the age of clouds of the whitest white
and the lightest blanket you cannot see through.
Your eyelids grow heavy and your dust sparks,
but you cannot hear my voice. You cannot touch
my face thrumming with the age dissolved,
with the minds that have nowhere to turn.
Everything is reflection, illusion, mirage.
You are time without an answer, the age of clouds
always coming together and separating. One
a colossal mouse, another a dragon with a blue snout.
A woman painting in silence who dreams the living and dying
breed in heavenly camps. Her children need
a real bed and warm arms—they're stained
with the sorrow that rises from the dirty streets
and bleeding mouths. While someone is searching
for the whitest white, another discovers the blackest black
is a space on the body where the woman would
wear a dress. As in every room a corner that never ends,
stealing the light, eating it, never letting it go.
Does that light disappear? It's like a wind,
an invisible flame in your loins, a divine voice
whose sound leaves no trace—When the young
dreamer lay dying in his sleeping bag
in the rusted bus, his mother heard him
calling in her dream. When Joan of Arc grew
invisible in the flames, where did her spirit go?

REFUGE

My mother painted a colorful jungle
on the upstairs balcony. A deer, bear,
lion, elephant, wolf, lamb and birds
looking at me as they flapped.
The Garden of Eden, she said, and let me
paint the black spots in each animal's eyes.

She called the spots holes
for the soul to pass through, but I saw only
how a tear left a trail down her face.
The grass in the yard yellowed, remained uncut
and blew in rivulets I would dance through

in bare feet, making a tunnel
to a hidden room of grass
my cheek could press into
as the leaves fell.
The clouds blanketed me with a damp scent
after the kids said I had the cooties.

In a tree hollow I found a piece of wood
and called it Adam. I sang to it
as I did to the clouds and the coal-blue
eyes of the tiger that stared down
from the mountainside just before
it started running toward me, then disappeared
at the moment I awoke, heart rising to the siren
that rang past my window.

The house wavered and breathed.
I saw my mother's baby, the one
who died without a name, and my father
who'd survived the war, but whose silence
about the camp became the spray
of sparks and shriek of the train
that struck him when I was too young
to remember. When I asked where
he went, my mother said he was crossing,
and something flashed out her eye,
clear as the eye of the Adam-stick,
the tiger and lamb that held me
transfixed, lost in my bed.

Today I found a half-broken egg
along the road with the unborn bird
still alive, the tiny pink arm
trying to claw its way out. It is
so thin between worlds—the one
in my hands so light
it is nothing I can ever touch.

ELEGY FOR A SCRAP

Where did the scrap of paper come from
to land here on this rug,
its feathery fiber stranded
from what seed to bloom
into sapling and leaf
that opened when a mother gave birth,
the child laid warm
and wet at her breast?
Long after the tree was cut open,
the sap oozed, seeping into the ground.
While the tissue was pressed into paper,
light left the heart

of seven year old Yusof
who, after eating a banana
and kissing his father
goodbye, was found in the rubble.
And 20 year old Shira
whose name means song.
And 30 year old Lurin who went
to take a shower, pray and rest.
“Struck while praying,” her fiancé said.

Each scrap reveals an unseen world
when it appears at a moment
like the lady’s slipper
hidden in the woods
that looks like a human form, its leaves
like outstretched arms, its blossom
a dark and secret perfume, sprouted
from the forest of ashes, voices and stars.

In a dream I was rapping
on my father’s door.
But it was bolted.
When I looked down
I saw a hole in my chest
where so many scraps have vanished,
and one was trying to sing.

A MOMENT IN ROME

On a chilly gray morning I step out of my hotel. I go without a map, turning to a woman in an orange headscarf who sits near the corner with a cup in front of her, waving to everyone who passes. Further on, another woman, in an open doorway, smiles through her missing teeth. Who am I to walk by? *And what can I do?* What does the man holding an apple, talking into the air, making his way through the middle of his life, do with me as he walks by? The sparrows are sharing a few crumbs. Women in burqas stare out from a curve in the road, their faces unlit, their heads like bells ringing all around, though traffic drowns them out. The Romans too tried to murder their ghosts. Where are the souls of those early Christians who were sick, poor and held only to their faith, their bodies dissolved in the catacombs? Or the souls of the Jews forced to live where the river overflowed, or those hoarded into trucks to be taken to the camps? What about those who shouted or were silenced, violated, condemned, forgiven, or not, or those who fell down before their captors, forgiving them, holding out hope and love beyond their death after those who buried them, those who saved only themselves. Or those who saved nothing for themselves? Who pass over us now, watching through the clouds or along the street? Who dwell within me whose voice is mute?

FROM A BENCH ON A HILL

--the earthquake of '76, Fagagna, Italy

It still holds the tremors.
The dogs that keep barking,
the man who keeps mowing his grass,
the stranger who rests here.

The village bell tolls for those
who do not hear it anymore
and those who remember when Earth bellowed out
and felt it in their stomach as the dark snow
loosed and the rock poured down.

Whoever rises from my seat has a faint
view of those who lived in the valleys
whose spirits come to the bell tower
and pathways as the evening
turns the color of plum.

Let her look at the jagged blue range in the distance—
and know they crumble. And the cypresses
that come to a vertical point,
and the mulberry trunks that hold inscrutable
faces in their knots and crevices.

Somewhere the deaf girl wakes
beside her freshly-picked pink
flowers strewn across her pillow
and hears a nightjar trill.

My legs, my back, my empty seat hold traces
of what follows the cries and echoes
between the bell chimes, where you too
might linger and hear
the sound of a fiddle, though the strings
broke. Or notice
the persimmons all lighted
with fruit. Or press a hawthorn berry
between your fingers. The juice is light
as the eyes of the old couple who often sit here
while blackbirds circle the castle remains.

VILLAGE

Heaven's in the voices.

Anne Marie Macari

Whatever is hushed comes
to light these chimes out my window
with a slight breath, to make them
ever so lightly clink, reminding me
of the bells of the village
where I once lived, now drowned out
by this windy night.

Some say the soul fleeing destruction
leaves the body
just before it's time.

In the ringing, such tones
whose names are forgotten,
released of all longing. Whatever it is
that separates us fades away.