

AISHA DOWN

Yaremche Series

I.

Snow brindled the hills late last night,
behind the gray clouds impending at the south horizon
rise white clouds, flared pink like a cut thumb,
an empty seashell opened to draining light.
Here are the hands, volunteering to be yours again,
knotted, bruised at the wrist. Here is flour, here the heart
that will fail you, the water's comprehending stain,
the bread that comes together, brief flesh
in your palms. Here are the inadequate resuscitations of art.
Here is yeast and yeast's rising—sightless belly,
soured breath.

Enrich it with eggs, with honey and caraway.
When the time comes, eat, let it be gone, scatter its remains
to the finches and the ravaging cats. Let the days
come as milk down the river, as tin roofs on churches, as the wakening rain.
It has had its green hours, your life, the time mounded
between yesterday and birth. It has wept clean years
as the peeled-back bark of the willow, the first good wound.
Now, perhaps at last, you can recognize it:
now the snowmelt, running stream will be your mirror.

II.

Tinned bulb of a country church in each cold hamlet,
turned earth, baled hay, plumed smoke rising
from the valley where someone burns raspberry brambles
off his grandmother's field. The potatoes' weeping
when you sliver them, alone today in the kitchen
is not your weeping—starch, no salt. The loneliness
is merely each form being true to itself, within
it recalling its old stamping between dawn and sun:
woven fence, white wall, cracked vein, iron cross.
This cold light calls us to assembly, one by one,
even the autumn's last apples, coppered fists

clenched against the silvering time. The new year
moves beneath its ice like a spear, a soundless fish.

III.

At four o'clock in winter the dark condenses
out of the light, like iron or lead from the river
in this Carpathian valley. It gives weight to the distance
between hour and hour, between the humped barn
and lone horse, the pull and flush of the heart's December.
Walking downhill, you think about silence:
does it fall in flakes like old light, umber
leaves, or is it the inward marrow of us,
ache of a hand left too long in water. Far
to the horizon, the yellowed proclamation of space:
the sky getting emptier, brushed with smoke
beneath which all's arranged, in place,
the barn with peeling paint, the unknown home,
the thing that drops through the ribs of you, rusted lock.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aisha Down is an investigative journalist with the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project and previously a reporter at *The Cambodia Daily*. Her poems have appeared in *Lilith*, *phoebe*, and *Under a Warm Green Linden*. She lives in Sarajevo.

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