Selected Poems

Adisa Bašić (Translated by Mirza Purić)

I SPEAK

It's not just my scarred face, my riven soul, my tormented body.

I also speak for three lepers
one who is filthy
four who are pitiable
a thousand mutes
two with a club foot
ten who've never had a man
five thousand cloistered ones
and four whose heads are covered.

For three who are denied a job
two who don't go to school for they aren't whores
three hundred who've been raped for they are whores.

For a little one
who believes she's leprous filthy pitiable mute.

And for one who is free
who meekly waits
to be born.
TAMENESS

You love me mindlessly precisely because I’m mad.
   I perform stunts in bed.
   I cook naked.
   I press the citrus squeezer on my mouth
   and talk like Darth Vader
   and you laugh.

When I smuggle bits of my madness outside
   in my hair, my bra, or under my tongue —
   that makes you sick.

Beyond our four walls
   even laughing out loud
   is quite, quite inappropriate.

HEROINE

He’s gone and gone and gone.
   His smell evanesced from the clothes in the wardrobe.
   Kids think they remember him.

Long hath he lain here before thee
   And after thee
   Long shall he lie ...

Underneath a virgin patch of grass.
   Underneath a layer of leaves.

He’s gone and gone and gone.
   And you wake over a shriveled memory.
   His likeness: a pressed flower.
Profusely we praise your dignity.
   You're the love we dream of.
   You're the loyalty we wish for.
   You're the picture that fits our frame.

And he's gone.
   And gone.
   And gone.

Nobody hears the night.
   You bite your hands till you bleed.
   Put fingers into yourself.
   Bang your head on the headboard.

In your lonely bed, you know:
   you don't remember him.

**DOMINATION**

the well-groomed old man says
   *you will return the favor someday*
   *we'll celebrate once this is over*

kisses me on the mouth lest there's doubt
   as to what he has in mind
   and how he means to collect the debt

towering over me he hugs me like he owns me
   as if we were in the poster
   for a black-and-white film from his youth

we both pretend that
   the threat frightens me
   not him
my body’s betrayed me
   in every way imaginable
   it never seems to run out of ideas

it swells puffs up and flakes
   cricks sticks and contorts
   bleeds as it pleases
   it’s creative — I must put up

I do not have a body
   I am my body

I read this sentence aloud

my body laughed from the heart
   across the lungs kidneys and ovaries
   all the way to the colon

it sat down
   and penned this poem

The poems “Govorim” (I speak), “Heroina” (Heroine), and “Krošćelj” (Tameness) were published in the collection Promotivni spot za moju domovinu (2010, A promotional video for my homeland). The poems “Nadmoć” (Domination) and “Tijelo se smije i piše pjesmu” (The body laughs, pens a poem) were published in the collection Košćela (2020, Nettle tree). They were translated by Mirza Purić and edited by Si Sophie Pages Whybrew and Dijana Simić.