translated by hakan ***c.***

I am duelling with a river

Good morning sadness! The blue cloud
hiding in my coffin
Let them take you out and show around
when they kill me
behind a yellow ocean
You go to the movies. Do go!
Get engaged, if you like,
iron your shirt, listen to the news,
watch the corpses of children
falling in the middle of your room
from your colour TV
Light your stove
with machine gun fire in Bosnia

2.
You are not in Bosnia
You are in New York or Istanbul
I don't know
where I am
who I am with
and when
who are my face and my hands with?
Am I drinking beer
inside the stomach of a whale?
Among the opera buidings and parks;
Maybe I am wounded like a diver
suffering from decompression sickness
blood running all over my face;
Bird shops
in the Las Ramblas boulevard
in Barcelona
Spanish girls
whose hair falling down to their hips
the portrait
a street painter did for me in Rome
do they redeem anything?

As I get to know more
I have less to say
Why are we? And why does the world exist?
My jacket is riddled with holes
I am wandering here and there
carrying swallows and missiles

One day we are all going to die
insects will eat
our penises and our hearts

3.
Our faces will shine
under the earth
like a mirror
I don't know you but
I am not going to take off my glasses
to see the worms and rains better
You too take a comb
to comb your hair
If you ask me: "Everyone should have his statue
made of marble"

When they put in the museum
our cold faces
let's not smile before the tourists come!
- haven't they already paid for their tickets!
You can carve everyone's face out of marble
but it's another matter to engrave
the faces of prophets
Because their faces
are as gentle as bird songs

4.
Everyone likes something:
maybe you like prophets
but I like orchids
and women
Kursat causes the best fight at bars
by nailing into the night
the raki glass in his hand
The elder brother of Turkish language is Cemal Sureya

Who gives the order to the sky to rain:
Necati Doluorman in Izmir
the negatives of life in his pocket
Mehmet H. Dogan beats up the street singers
who rape the young Izmir night
and a glass of raki drunk with pleasure
by playing arabesgue music.
Galip Akcali
banishes himself
under the orange trees in Bodrum.
Ahmet Necdet in Izmir Cukuru
in any bar he goes to
akes out of his pocket
either his poems or the Enlightenment

5.
Everyone likes something:
Mr Jesus used to like nails
Mr Muhammed his wives
My lover Leyla from primary school!
Now a mother with three children in Kalamis
used to like so much
holding my penis in arithmetic lessons

Life is like a revolving wheel at a fun fair
What is that which they call "heaven"?
Land for sale, child!
If we collect bottle lids,
red ones, one paperbag full,
would uncle God like us
maybe he would allow us to ride on his bicycle.
- Cemal!!! Are the girls alright there?

6.
You go to the marketplace: How nice!
You've filled up your bag with bargains
You have your coal and wood supply for winter as well
A cup of tea in your hand
you're looking at the nude and bloody picture
of a dead woman on the newspaper,
who committed suicide with her child
People were burnt alive in Sivas: you remain silent!
You haven't even read a line
from Metin
from Asim!

Juntas have come and passed: you remained silent!
Be silent, Mr, be silent! You were never born!
You!
were
never
born ...

7.
A Bosnian child
is looking for his leg
ripped off by shrapnel
- Have you seen it?

8.
What have we witnessed, the great stream?
The big brother
which came down to us
by flowing through the white bellies
of the fish and the stars
of Caesar and Cleopatra!
The eternal and blue hour of the Universe
The rain inside a bird!

- What have we witnessed with you?
We have witnessed the cities and rivers
hanged by spears

9.
Stockholm:
the city fluttering
between blue towers and canals
She awakens below the snow
with the smell of hot, fresh coffee
I reach out every morning
and steal a few lines
from the waters of the Bosphorus
Or I dig out a time-worn sadness
deep in the coral shores of Foca
Is it any different
drinking tea in Van
than looking across the Bosphorus
in Istanbul
If you're not in love
the Sea won't kiss you

- What time is it? What an absurd question

Are we playing hide-and-seek with Napoleon?
Who destroyed the Berlin Wall? Birds?
Dictators assemble for parade in our era: one by one
they go into the debris of History
I think we're going to leave
our big ordeals behind
and see the coming of a good century
my friends...
And I - if I live -
in the year 2000
will ride on the World again
and continue to give out poems
as an old poet
10.
Books, yellow roses
and rivers as well go sightseeing
They do their jackets in yellow tramcars
Nobody has taught them
how to sing: they stay contemplative
They had learnt in primary school
how to splash their feet
in the sea
11.
You all know it: a terrace is not
a guillotine
nor is a steppe a cloud
A bird doesn't catch a train
but window shutters always tap
against the Taurus mountains
You've shot your gun
but why
do you drink your arsenic without milk?
- What did you study in primary school?
12.
- Did you study Barbaros Hayrettin Pasa,
Gulliver, Robinson Crusoe? Pekosbil?
Uncle Barbaros!
Uncle with his hat made of winds!
When we last drunk red wine
with silver cups
the fish didn't eat your blue beard
in the Mediterrenean Sea
I was a young pirate then
combing his hair with rum
An Italian beauty
With shivering hips like the sea
raped me for 7 days and 7 nights
on a gold plated bedstead

13.
My friends Pekosbil and Jane Calamity
they've come and rode on acacia trees
they've got the spring engaged
with a snow-white bison
we are going to smoke the peace pipe
with our Indian brothers and sisters
before the northerners in blue uniforms
open up their stomachs with their long knives

14.
Dr Whitman was found ice dead
in the North Pole - after 100 years -
Under a photogenic light
he had written these last lines
on his notebook:

- There is no grass here but
there are nice Eskimo girls

15.
I am in the Far East in a Chinese boutique
Behind the counter an old Chinaman sells
smoked sea snakes, mussels dead eagles, small trees
and handcarts
A green Budha statue
is looking at History secretly
through a keyhole
Fish who have caught cold
are riding on bicyles

Ants are wandering in cadillacs
I shake hands
with a crocodile
who has just
finished his breakfast

The Chinaman’s voice comes from deep in the cosmos:
- Mr! he says, here are our queens
French, English, Japanese, Arab
Their necks are so thin like a decanter
Cut under the
G
U
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-Which one would you like?

16.
His 13 year old daughter shouts from the kitchen:
- Please! Tell me, dad,
how would I make the soup
without killing the tortoise
?

The white dove
having rearranged her glasses
is picking with her beak
the little pink papers
from the "board of luck and good fortune":

There is no forest in Iceland
And Indians don't have beards

Casanova used to drink chocolate
not champagne

What would happen
if Havva (Eve) bit the snake
instead of the apple?

The Chinese wear white
in times of death: in China
the colour of pain is white

Rilke and Orhan Veli
two wizards
drink raki in the meyhane of Kaptan
looking across the Bosphorus

Every night
how can you become Mongolian, Zuhtu?

The coffin of each star
is a black hole in the space

How can you cut
an ant's head on the guillotine?
This is not a question
it's a puff up

A Japanese prime minister rules Peru
What about our hearts?
Who is ruling our hearts?

The police arrested Rimbaud
after they caught him in an indecent act with his poems

I am sleeping on a cloud
Pass me slowly underneath

"Human beings: what a pity?" said
Augusti Strindberg

An Islandic beauty gushes out from my saxophone

17.
You've gone to the marketplace: how nice!
You've filled up your bag cheaply: how nice!
You got married and had children: how nice!
A Bosnian child
is looking for his leg
ripped off by shrapnel
- Was it you who sold it to the butcher?

18.
In Barcelona
I am putting my feet in the sea
My feet touch a woman's foot
in Antalya
If we didn't have our feet
we would have fallen from the earth
and maybe our shirts would have got tangled
in the stars and
we would have remained suspended
in the air
Whenever I go to Izmir
I collect my first poems from the streets
My heart comes under missile fire
of an old and painful love
In my pocket a notebook
with previous convictions
full of new poems
so many addresses I have

If you want
take my photos again
with the sounds of rain
Mount me on your hips
tossing about like the sea
put a blue lake on our bed
instead of a sheet

19.
Ah Nile! All of us were made
out of your mud
You,
You kiss with desert winds
in December
that's why
your grey waves become a pink fire
Birds and pharocks make love on you

What is that which ill-treats me
in the river Nile or in an Egean city?
What is that which saddens me?
The little child who sells flowers in Eminonu shouts:

-Today violets are so full of it!

20.
Dionysos discovered wine
by squeezing grapes in his hands
Goya, the master of colours
drew his first patterns with coal
The ear which Van Gogh cut and wrap inside a towel
is listening to us...
That big ear that hears infinitely everything!
A convicted and nomad child inside me:

I a m d u e l l i n g w i t h a r i v e r.

Özkan Mert

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