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THREE POEMS

BY ADVAN MAHMOUDOVIC

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Every Remembering Is a Lamentation

I don't remember my mother
beating me early in the evenings,
late after lunch, just in time for
breakfast sandwiches and cold chocolate.

I don't remember my father
and my seven brothers going
off to work without kissing me
and calling me Snow White.

I don't remember pulling
other girls by the braids,
or snatching their ugly boyfriends
just because I could.

I don't remember hectically
hurtling knife after knife
at the man who took my virginity,
or sticking a fork into his green eyes.

I don't remember a word of
advice from behind my back nor
the calming streams of acid nor
the difference between the twin moons.

I remember the gray pigeons fed
in the city park from the hands
of a blind old man with eight fingers
and all-weather boots.

I remember the last breath of mint
from a local fortune teller who never
predicted her own death nor
the late return of her sons.

I remember the open sea between

Poland and Scandinavia and the giant
who chopped a piece of a mountain
and made a step stone for his wife.

And I remember lying at death
and getting a gentle kiss from
the fairest and the darkest African
prince on a sunburnt horse.

Homecoming

The heat of a summer night brewed
camomile growth in my backyard
when I left my country.

Winter Sweden whetted my nose hair
with the smells of baked bread,
saffron buns and cinnamon pastry.

Fifteen years later I enter my old house,
the fumes grip my tongue
and make words clammy.

Everything feels real like a good
steady dream, a dream that does not
leave you when you wake up.

The neighborhood is almost preserved except for
unrecognizable faces framed in familiar windows.
It is nice and ghostly to be there again.

I caress the cold stove to which I was strapped,
my eyes bulging at the short queue of
soldiers and civilians, not more than five of them.

I gave up screeching after the third.

I admire the stamina of men,

posing for foreign photographers
from behind a fence, and somehow
with their thirsty clammy lips
smacking a word in a foreign,
yet recognizable tongue, fresh and crisp
like your mother's breath! "help".

My old bedroom is empty, once again.
I wonder if they took all our furniture with them
or burned the lot.

I wonder how they survived winter without us and
why they left hooks welded to the curtain holders,
with smoked-meat rests all scorched and salt-white.

Back in Sweden, the Persian grocers have baked
ten kinds of fummy bread, raisin buns, Danish pastry,

baklava and American doughnuts.

I was not gone a month, and already
he has renamed his store
“There’s no place like home”.

You Told My Mother She Was a Bitch

You told my mother she was a bitch
Over a cold dinner dish.
You dared her to cry and screech.

‘Stop whinin’ you bleedin’ witch!
As a beast on a leash,
You spat my mum like a crying bitch.

Oh you damn stinking flitch.
You rubbed her face with salty fish,
And made her cry and screech.

Then put your palm on her neck, a hitch.
She swiveled her eyes, divulged a wish.
You told my mother she was a bitch.

I took a bat and served you a pitch.
Now you were a cold fish.
You wrenched her to cry and screech.

Behind the bars I cannot breach
The line of silence of a granted wish.
You told my mother she was a bitch,
You dared her to cry and screech.

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Adnan Mahmutovic is a Bosnian exile in Sweden. He is finishing his PhD in English literature. He has published short stories and poems, some collected in a book entitled *[REFUGE]E* (2005), two novellas, *Illegitimate* (Cantarabooks, 2009), and *Thinner than a Hair* (forthcoming with Cinnamon Press, 2010). His story "The Washing" has been turned into a film (in postproduction). Adnan is a proud member of PEN, the international organization that fights for the rights of exiled writers. www.adnanmahmutovic.com.