

Mme Intuita Passing As a Phoenix

Madame Intuita reflects on the origins
of her name —
intuitas sum —
as in pondering
meditating
seeing with her Third Eye
(she's fond of juggling definitions like balls of light)

though she immediately tosses out that idea
along with the rest of her journal
in which she's jotted down
the history of her soul's hunger
Hambre del alma

She envisions herself ironically
standing on stilts
on the third step of a ladder
offering shelter
to all manner of subcelestial poets

She tries on a red wig
and drapes a veil over her face
which also happens to be red
and suddenly she's transmuted into flame
burning at her own stake
and shortly after, she disappears
into a crowd of distinguished guests
vanishes at a tram stop
confuses which key is which

covers her tracks

She crooks her head
like a contented bird
smoothing and ruffling her feathers
seeing her reflection in a puddle
A sudden and unseemly transformation
down to the tracing of the papillary line

Mme Intuita remembers
why she has returned to the source
She wants to exalt
some *bonnes amies*
and herself

Izabela Filipiak, trans. Karen Kovacik

Razor

I'd hardly got undressed when he said:
My wife left me for another woman.
Hurt him like hell.
On my way out the door, I thought,
Honey, I can understand why.

When he ran into her at a bar
She was different, like a razor,
All nonchalance, cigarette, and shaved head.
A militant bitch who wouldn't let anything slide.
That other one turned her against him.
If not for *her*, they could still get along.

The girlfriend eyed them discreetly
From above the jukebox.

You know me, Razor told him.
If I were miserable,
Then maybe I'd miss you.
If I were just sort of happy,
Then I'd be able to forgive you.
But the way it's going, honey,
it doesn't look good,
it doesn't look good for you.

Izabela Filipiak, trans. Karen Kovacik

Conversions

So the first guy said to me—
he looked like a jock—
why would anyone be attracted to a man?
(I think he left himself out of this equation.)

You know, he said, guys smell, they're hairy.
You're delicate, your skin's so smooth,
like the grips on weight machines, he said,
and let's face it, there's no hair on *your* chest.
If I ever woke up one day as a woman,
I'd definitely be a lesbian.
Not the kind with flannel shirts
and scars on their arms, he added.
I know enough of those in my life as a guy.
Why change if it would all be the same?
If I were a woman, I'd like to be naked
forever on some beach, wearing only a necklace
of wind and feathers.
(He later moved to Hawaii, I heard.)

The second guy doled out his love to me
in stingy portions. In a dream once, he told me,
By loving you, I turn into you.
(When I woke, I could feel his dismay.)

I asked a third guy about the meaning of the dream.
He explained: To become the person you love—
is there a truer surrender?

New Age Whore

After hours, she cloisters
herself in her cell.

She considers herself a priestess
of some clandestine religion
and the other whores her acolytes.

They've sworn a vow
to bring infinite love to the city
without letting on to their clients.

All the violence in the world
she redeems daily
through literal offerings
of blood, sweat, and sperm
which like the human body
must be transfigured.

Through her rituals she defuses
wars, revolutions, coups,
terrorist attacks.

After the first five guys
she didn't yet know
what men were for.
She began to appreciate them
only after fifty and up.

Now she's been blessed
with cosmic understanding,
the mysteries of saint prostitute revealed!

At last, she's come into her own.

For the first time in her life

she doesn't wish to disappear.

Izabela Filipiak, trans. Karen Kovacik and the author

Mme Intuita, Vampire-Killer, Grants an Interview

No one is born
With that kind of power

To get it
You have to die a proper death
Three times minimum

Usually I allow them a nibble
Sometimes I have no choice
Now and then they surprise me

In those cases I lie face down
For a long time
Until I recover my reason

The miraculous effects
Of that procedure
Are also guaranteed
By our makeover salons:

“Mme Intuita & Co.”
“Return to Transylvania”
And “Spectral Kiss”

Things that earlier
Might have contributed to your death
Now lose their power over you

But it's important to reserve
At least a quarter of your lungpower
For when you return

Or have someone on hand to take your pulse
And maybe thump you hard
A couple times in the chest

Sometimes it happens
You'll be gone a second too long
Too far to return

Still and all, there are benefits
From coming to grips
With the claw of eternity

Izabela Filipiak, trans. Karen Kovacik

Chrysalis

Lean and hungry women take on new strength
when disguised as men.

They wrap themselves in tailored suits as in cocoons
They savor the simplicity of the cut,
the smooth material, the presence of pockets.
Above all, they don't have to accessorize.

What's more, dressed in this manner,
they begin to speak more calmly,
with a precise elegance, no frills.
Words unspool from them,
from the core of their being,
and fitfully, they take flight.

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Metamorphoses

Hard to call it tempestuous love
when you can't stop laughing
My lover isn't a woman
She's a little critter

She has four paws and a sleek coat
We've stopped using words
Just growls and purrs
and all manner of animalness

Sometimes she's a koala
and I a branch of eucalyptus
Or she's a big scary King Kong
and I her rescued innocent
And then she's some
unidentified little ball of fur
squealing in my hands
or a wet tongue
puffing from pleasure
who sometimes to cheer me up
slides across my nose

She's only a person
when she gets serious and says:
I'm tired, I've had it
And I don't know what to turn into
how to coax her back from humanness
For awhile it's all quiet

until somehow
we push past that border and
argh
it's just like on the human side
here on this same old couch
feeling skittish

but even still it's always cozier
critter to critter

Izabela Filipiak, trans. Karen Kovacic

Domestic Myths

My giantess works in the kitchen
My titaness feeds me hot meals
makes sure I don't go hungry
juggles pots, twirls smoking pans

She tells me: You used to be such a skinny little chicken
And now you've turned into my tasty little chicken morsel

She leads me to the bed and lays me out
on the sheet like a white statuette washed by the waves
still sparkling from the salt and cuddled by an octopus
her embrace less tender than fierce

Curled up like an oyster, I let myself be consumed
Somewhere in the background, she's running water for my bath

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Madame Intuita

My whole life's like learning a second language—
so many immigrant sacrifices and in the end
I can't get rid of this accent,
recognized everywhere to my dismay.
And I'd been feeling quite assimilated!
All that effort, and for what?

Discouraged without wanting to admit it,
I enroll in a class of heightened conversation.
There, I also speak with an accent—
even thicker—sometimes I lose whole threads
or connections. I guess it can't be helped.

You can call this a 'mother tongue'
but I don't have a mother, only a handful
of old wives' tales and myths: watch the distracted
woman dancing on a tightrope—will she fall?
will she find something to grab onto?
The careful charting of her shifts in mood
doesn't exactly encourage fluency.

That other language, elusive yet familiar, is like water:
slips through my fingers, now empty again
but for a trace of dampness, an aftertaste
of crystalline pleasure. Like an early Renaissance poet,
I savor the elaborate undergirding of Latin
with its praiseworthy logic and concision.
Despite efforts to blot out that passionate study,
it will never fully disappear.

The language of the educated classes
gives me an edge in rhetorical contests.
But in the heat of the moment
I lose sight of its sensible rules,
the origins of words grow uncertain.

Unsure of myself, I stop speaking altogether
and just listen to the cascade of sounds—
a mountain stream spilling onto a valley of rocks
which disappears like a shaky pulse, an echo,
a gnome— Now you hear me, now you don't—
and before I'm able to laugh, I have to wade
through layers of hurt and shame. How to cope?

Elsewhere I come upon fragments of letters, stories broken off.
I tie up those loose ends, restore lines with my brush.
I'm content, I only look, I don't say a thing,
don't dare to breathe even so as not to frighten
this roadside creature half-woman, half-beast.
When I turn around and look that way again
will I find at least a print from her tiny hoof?

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