

TAKE THESE ROSES, MY LOVELY

translated by Kika Bomer

What was the reason for my feeling of alienation from this man, who, since the first time I lay in his arms, brought the word love into my language? My expression, which caught his hasty movements while pulling in the line, was cold.

"Help me", he called, without raising his head.

I sprang on the boat to him and began to roll up the wet rope.

On his face was a wide smile as he turned and said, "We're on our way again!"

I sensed how my lips also swung open, my eyes squinting in a grimace of affection. For a moment the smile on his round face erased all doubt, and I opened my heart; it was so easy to repay his smile with my trust.

His strong hands grasped and turned the rudder until we eventually glided into the current of the river.

Elms and hazelnut bushes and wild Christroses grew on the banks of the river, Oh Father, bring me the branch of a rose. The vines wrapped around the wild climatis, sumptuous bushes decorated with the feathery fruit of last year. From underneath the thick foliage small lances of the spring onion plants made their way to the sky. Meadows sprung up near the water, their blossoms already exploding, the pollen from the cattails showering yellow fountains, vibrating in the mild air carried to us from an eastern breeze. For days we didn't see another person. Occasionally we saw abandoned farmsteads in coves. A flock of finch swarmed above us and noisily made its way to the forest and disappeared.

The man sat next to the rudder, his eyes gazing into the distance. He often sat like that. Was he thinking of the cities, the landscapes before us? The river in the past few days was widening, but the man had said we were far from its mouth. Had he traveled this way before? He answered no to my questions, but wasn't it possible that he'd forgotten? I've also forgotten much of what lies in my past.

Suddenly the man looked at me. I was leaning on the tiny wall of the cabin, and maybe he'd noticed how I was looking at him.

"Your hair, it shines so nicely in the morning light", he said.

I reached my hand to my hair and let it glide through my fingers. It was so short now that it ended at my breasts when I stood up.

"Will you let it down for me again?" he asked me.

I took the band off my head as I walked to him and crouched at his feet. I looked up and smiled. His hand softly stroked my scalp and then slid down to my cheek.

"Where will our journey take us?" I was clueless, as if newborn.

"To all the landscapes of the world, wherever you want."

I laughed happily at such an offer. "China, Iceland, Patagonia, the Galapago Islands, a ball ..."

As I fantasized, he bent before me and his lips brushed mine. I swung my arms around his neck and pressed myself to his body.

Under the boat swam a giant fish through the slimy ground, his dark back hitting the bottom of our boat. I stiffened in horror but the man, sensing my fear, held me lightly and whispered in my ear, "They are big, but not dangerous to people. You shouldn't fear animals, for you are the mistress, and the animal serves you."

I pulled away from him. I remembered the branch of the rose: small; dark red blossoms; full, heavy, sweet smell. Someone with cold hands had given me the branch. My Lovely, take these roses, but you will pay.

Before us appeared a lush island in the middle of the river. The curling waves netted the plants and we traveled fast, as if driven by a high tide. The man swung the rudder around, his attention focused solely on steering, as if I were a product he needed to transport. Now the current tugged us further into the middle of the river towards the island. The man fell to his knees and swung the rudder around. We were caught in an eddy. Frolicking waves sprung around us. Their happiness seemed to reach toward me, I felt like laughing, one side of the raft fell under water, I heard the man's gasping, and the uncontrollable desire to laugh pearled over my lips, I clapped in delight and then took

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fright as a wave rolled to my feet. With one leap I swung myself on the cabin's roof and observed the water, which now seemed like an enemy that strived to keep me from my happiness, full of loathing.

We swam with a racing speed to the island. Distorted faces in the gaped lights came towards me from the decaying felled trees, and the wounds of their growth bubbled with their secretion, as if their dying were an act of liveliness.

And then suddenly my vision cleared. The island was gone, the wild waves grew calm, and we glided on the surface of the water.

At dusk the man anchored the boat closer to shore. We sat before a coal pit, and the man cooked something.

He split the meal and handed me a plate. I tasted it.

"You like it?"

I nodded.

"Where are you from?" He touched my nose with a finger.

I smiled. "I don't know."

Something glimmered in his eyes as he said, "One day you'll tell me."

The hope in his words was sweeter than anything I'd ever heard.

"I want you to hold me the way you did last night", I asked him.

His hand the one holding the cooking spoon trembled as he answered, "It makes me very happy to hear you say that."

Because I was still learning, I believed to know what he was feeling.

"Hey Lovely," the man said, "can I watch you undress?"

I looked up at him in surprise. I never knew that was something to ask for. I nodded and grabbed the hem of my dress to pull it over my head.

"Hey, my lovely", said the man, "do you want to be my woman?"

I walked up to him and laid my hand on his chest. At first I didn't answer him because I didn't understand the meaning of his words, but then I saw his lips silently form the word with which he had bound me, the word Love, Love, Love, and so I answered trembling, "Yes, my man", and he embraced me sobbing, and whatever I once was, in his embrace I became the woman he wished for, and I had three names. The first one was stranger, but my essence was woman, and the word with which he recognized me was love.

And the young March morning covered us as man and woman, who delicately held each other, and the rising sun shined on my happy face, while both our eyes fervently lost themselves in each other.

"Do you love me?" asked the man. He asked it casually and I admitted with fear, "I don't know what the word means." And wasn't it the case, that this word was his discovery, his powerful magic, with which he could bind me to him, and with which he bound himself to me. How did he expect me to also be able to master this word?

The trees were turning green when we saw the first city on the left bank of the river. The man was thrilled and grabbed my shoulder and laughed. "We can walk through the streets and boulevards, go into tiny cafes and look at the painting of the sunflower field!"

"Yes", I answered, "I want to follow you everywhere and learn your ways."

He turned to me and looked at me with caution, the peace in his eyes turned into a question. An uncomfortable red climbed into my face and I said, "But isn't my dress too ugly for such a big city?"

His expression was tender as he answered, "You are so beautiful, my woman, that nothing could hide it."

A city like a monstrous ulcer of stone and bronze, thousands of vehicles, of men and women. This day I realized that I was one of them, one of the innumerable same beings. I walked between houses, giant chasms beneath me, and felt the stares of the thousand men and thousand women, which, without asking, undressed me. My hand held my man's, whose questions once seemed so strange to me. Suddenly I understood the experience of language as structure where feelings could be made clear. Every situation had been embedded in words since I climbed onto the boat that morning in March, and

now I realized that language was the most important part of being human. Was I capable of recognition without language, or did the river and the cove with the Christroses think into my own silence their sentences and words? How did I think, as I climbed onto the man's boat? Was I without words, speechless, simply perceiving in images? Were my first hours on the river's bank silent, yet still full of the consciousness of me? And before, this strange dream of before--or was there only nothingness? What was my consciousness before the man reached out his hand to me with the words, "Come, you must be freezing in your loneliness."

Slowly the words took on meaning and opened the way to memory. It astounded me, My Lovely, take these roses, but you will pay, and I pressed my man's hand, the man who tried to teach me this word, the word that had to do with his joyful face and questions like 'My Lovely, can I watch you undress?' Because while the looks from the thousand men and the thousand women meant nothing to me, the look from my man meant everything to me, and so I stopped him in the dark wilderness of the city and turned to him and said, "Yes, I love you."

The young morning of the May day found us on a terrace of a cafe, sitting on cold iron chairs as lovers, and I understood the word so well now that it became the singularity of what he meant to me. Living seemed more precious to me now that I believed to understand the essence of love.

Shortly after we returned to our boat and continued our journey on the river. The water was warm and friendly but scared me nevertheless, so that whenever the man jumped in I never followed him, although as he swam away with powerful strokes he called to me to join him.

"Come in, it's great!" he shouted.

I could read every wish in his eyes and was ready to give him everything for the gift of the one word. But I refused and would only touch the river water when contained in a bucket or a pot.

"What a fear of water you have", said the man laughing. One time he tried to push me in. I made a desperate turn to keep from hitting the water and fell clumsily on the plank while crying out in pain.

"I'm sorry." Guiltily he leaned over me. He read the horror in my expression. He wrapped an arm around me.

"Does your fear have to do with how you came to the cove of Christroses? I didn't know you feared water so much. Okay, now I know, and I'll protect you from the water."

I believed again to understand something about the word.

As the sun reached its turning point, the man embraced me and said that he'd like to have a child with me, a sign of our love. At first I didn't understand why we would need this sign, because it seemed love itself was a sign, and I had never been a creature who birthed. The word love changed the man's wishes to something I needed to think about.

"How old are you?" he asked while stroking my back with his gentle hands.

I turned to him and beamed. "One hundred and ten days."

With a serious expression he closed me in his embrace and whispered the word endlessly.

One morning the man said to me, "You never bleed."

Bewildered I answered, "I haven't hurt myself."

He observed me for a long time.

"Where do you come from?"

I dropped my eyes as if I had something shameful to hide. "I don't know."

But in his face I discovered mistrust and worry, and in my heart arose worry and a dark foreboding. My Lovely, take these roses, but you will pay dearly for them.

In the following weeks the man sometimes forgot to bring me a fresh bouquet of beautiful flowers, or when he did, the old ones were often already wilted. When I threw them in the water, their ugly petals floated next to the boat as if sick, whereas before they were always swallowed by the stream in a friendly gesture of freedom between me

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and the water.

The nights were getting cooler, but the man covered my body with his and kept me warm.

One morning in October the river widened to a sea. I'd never seen so much water. There was no shore in sight. I covered my eyes and cried out in fear.

The man observed me and frowned. He was angry. "You're so childish. That's the mouth of the river, a threshold, where the known confronts the unknown, where something new grows out of the old, transforms."

He blew open the sails, which he hadn't used before, in order to steer toward the northern shore.

It was a cold morning blanketed in fog, and I shivered in fear for the life I had begun to love. I saw the city. Out of its center another stream flowed into the mouth of the river, spanned by two bridges made of iron rails. As we sailed under them, a train raced above our heads hissing and roaring. The violence of its speed threw me on the planks, and because I'd never experienced such a thing before, I felt as if pushed down to the river's floor.

Then the spectre was gone, and the man sat at the rudder with his back facing me.

"Where do you come from?" he asked, but his voice this time was cold and indifferent, and my eyes gazed at his back as I whispered, "Out of Nothingness."

As if burdened by something that had become tiresome to him, he shrugged his shoulders.

His dark expression lightened when we reached harbor. He hung the jacket over my shoulders and kissed my cheek. "Let's go eat."

He led me to a small restaurant, warm and smelling of food. Curious looks from the thousand men clung to me, but I didn't care anymore. I'd already learned that it was normal. The waitress was friendly. Maybe she saw my insecurity, because she looked at me with a concerned and attentive expression.

Later a loud group of people entered. In the middle was a slender woman who strived to attract people's attention. It was as if her body asked us to undress her with our eyes. She gathered everyone's gazes, although they didn't seem to mean anything to her. Only the apparent disinterest of the man at my side caught her attention, whose hands trembled while raising his wine glass. She was surrounded by a thousand men and only saw the one who knew the word.

A strange pain gripped me as I noticed how the man looked at her. And I realized that day I would learn something essential about the word, that I could experience everything about being human, and maybe also about my origin and where I would go to from this horrible river's mouth.

The man paid and went to the door. He held it open for me, and his gaze wandered passed me and back to the restaurant. Silently we stepped on the deck, where on the end of the pier our boat peacefully floated on the water. I turned to the man. He observed me.

"You've always known where you come from."

I shook my head.

As if I were stubbornly insisting on maintaining a lie which he could not bear anymore, his expression became closed.

"Good," he nodded, "You should know this has gone too far."

He turned, walked away, and left me in the darkness. Behind me the water crashed against the walled-in shore, whipped about, sighed in the distance. A horrible weight pressed me to the ground, my knees collapsed. I fell and caught myself with my palms, and the wind's cold front grasped my hair as if it wanted to pull me into the water. I struggled and then stood up, the weight of the word resting on my shoulders.

I followed the man into the restaurant, but by the way the waitress averted her eyes I knew he'd already left, and I had no idea where in that big city I would find him.

Standing on the empty plaza in front of the restaurant, I saw the openings of many small dark tiny streets, and I thought I heard the word in the darkness, so I followed it until I was sure it was his voice. Love, I heard the pleading, deep and soft voice whisper, Dear,

Loved One, Love, you woman. A happy sigh answered his magic word, and my lips glided apart, the cold wind of autumn played on my tongue, Love came the word out of his beautiful mouth. I imagined his soft lips against the woman's ears. I imagined the fervent look penetrating her pupils, his hands on her shoulders, shoulders of love, while my shoulders were suddenly being robbed of their weight. It was as if my body lost the weight of the earth, as the burden of what the man called love was suddenly taken from me. My substance disappeared, I opened my eyes wide in surprise as I felt the recognition of this weightless state, something familiar, and my mistrust fell off of me together with the word Love. Love was what the man's delicate mouth whispered on the woman's breast, and she would become beautiful under his strokes, her plump form graceful under his hands, but I would become weightless, my body transforming into only the thought of a body. Oh, Father, the monster is not an animal but a human and unfaithful to what I am, what am I then?

I stand in a city surrounded by mountains of buildings. In a room a man leads a woman to bed, and she is small and big and plump and her body is fat and slim and her hair is brown and black and red, and her face is beautiful and ugly, and she is old and very young, and her breasts hang heavy or curve against the palms of his hands, and her stomach is soft and hard, and her sex is damp and open, and his words are Love, Love, Love, and her name is a thousand names, but I only have three: the first is stranger, but the second name is Undine.

I stand in a tiny street, the light from a window shining on me, behind which the man holds a thousand women. His stiff member presses softly against the bellies of a thousand women, and I take a step back, because something unties me from life, and I let my hair loose. You are the mistress here, whispers the man in the ears of a thousand women, and I hear every one of his words, Love, Love, Love, but they don't apply to me anymore, and I take another step back and find myself on a rocking boat, which whirls around and loses itself in the middle of the mouth of the river, exactly on the border between the eternity of the salty ocean and the limits of the river's flow, and I am light, my hair covers my naked body, so unique, and yet like a thousand others, and in shame I hear the word Love, which almost turned me into a human. Oh, Father, why didn't you teach me about how humans really are, that the meanings of words is arbitrary for humans on a short journey, why didn't you refuse me the roses?

The lights of the city shine far away. Through the silence a whisper penetrates, a groan, a promise in my ears. Love, Love, Love. How weightless I've become without that strange feeling of love. And yet the loss still tortures me while I complete the third step far into the distance and let myself glide in the current with open eyes. I turn back to where I entered this world one wild night on a shore full of Christroses. I taste a little salt on my lips, but I turn towards the waves of the river, where I will lie on the breast of my father, as if I'd never left his realm.

With a slow turn of my body I swim past the city, where a man with a powerful word lures me, but I lie with open eyes in a slimy river, and my hair dances around my shoulders, and I hear the word, Love, Love, Love, but I don't understand what it means, and I lie in the water with open eyes and don't know anymore what words are, and then I'm far away from this body and see it like an uprooted piece of seaweed driven into the deep sea. Small fish suck on its rosy nipples, nest in its golden hair, kiss its open lips, lick the salt from its eyes.

And with a small movement I lose my body completely and glide into Nothingness, from where at one time something lured me, sweeter than life itself.