



moldovan hotel



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p o e m s

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## *For You Shall Be Called To Account*

The ancestors of everyone I've let into my body are gathered in a small room with one window, no lights. Yes, the room is crowded. Yes, there are no chairs. Yes, they are talking—why are we here, says the Nazi resister. Where are the chairs, says the Viking (no horns). Where is the light, say the people with their new French name hung around their necks heavy like a long black cross. Here, says the grand wizard, and a long white light descends from a point from the ceiling. The people of the oldest empire are here, too, they have brought their own fire (hidden), they too can speak French, they know in an instant not to trust that light. They are opening the window. How do we get away from these people, they murmur. True Aryans! say the Nazis with their new French name. No one is speaking to the Catholics. There is a knock on the door—there is a door. More Nazis. How did this happen? Outside the open window there is a small huddle of shawls and feet and candlesticks, a suitcase and a cane. Someone has forgotten their things, says the Nazi resister. The candlesticks turn into my great-grandmother, their tarnish to coal smears, the cane grows tall into my great-zayde, the shawl his mother, suitcase an uncle with an aunt inside. The feet are just empty shoes—my cousins have already died. The small huddle of my family outside the open window begins to sink to a great distance,

first one storey, then a long drop. Someone spits through the open window. My great-zayde shields his face. Great-grandmother looks up. What are those people, she says, doing in that room?

## ***Annex***

### ***“BASARABIA E ROMÂNIA”***

*–Graffiti slogan found across Romania. Reading “Bessarabia is Romania,” it refers to territory annexed by Russia which now forms the Republic of Moldova.*

No matter your love for the trees, the colour blue,  
twilight comes to the forest. False border

between day and night and safety. Bessarabia calcifies  
around me, shatters and dissolves. Heralds electric light.

The only reason we know where we are is a bird call  
that screams from the future—*That’s not a real place anymore,*

over and over. The edge of Europe is a river  
that recedes from Ukraine saying *get out now*. Somewhere,

a foundry begins to glow a faint fire. The air turns to smoke. Iron  
pulls itself back into the earth, dreading

a national purpose. I pull the forest around me and sprout needles,  
I pull the forest around me and grow knots, acacia bole,

soak up groundwater. Fade into a steppe  
and wait for death. Night is that bird call.

Night, your friend, the thief, is ruined. Night is  
a uniform, the earth who never turned you

away. Bessarabia collapses  
out of English—becomes spray paint

on an overpass, primary colours on cement,  
block letters crushed into a church.

Does the earth turn towards you or away? What do you call  
something you see everywhere, that tried to kill you,

but doesn't exist anymore?

## ***Two Villages***

*after "Running Orders" by Lena Khalaf Tuffaha*

Red wrought iron,  
blue roof.

White acacia,  
yard full of chickens.

A knock on the door.  
*This is David.*

First they confiscate our house,  
give it to the neighbours,

if they don't kill us first.

Then they sell us to  
the next country

\* \* \*

Red wrought iron,  
blue roof.

Olive tree,  
yard of almonds.

Roof-knock.  
*David.*

First they confiscate your house,  
give it to a bulldozer,  
keep the tree.

If they don't kill you first then  
they sell you  
to another country,

still wearing the key to your house  
around your neck

## ***For Every Animal of the Forest Is Mine***

*“The round-up of the Jews [in Herta] was completed rapidly with the aid of a local fiddler who was familiar with the Jewish homes.”*

–Yad Vashem Report on the Holocaust in Romania, “The National Legionary State and Romanian Jewry” (p. 26)

Later, when you said you were going to become a pastor, a forest sprang up around us, blue-dark; the ceiling of the hostel gave way to branches; the legs of the bedframe split down into roots. You said you were really into being good to women, and my namesake cousin with her lantern took a small step out of the trees. I moaned and you thought I loved it, the forest of ruinous Europe invisible to you, my cousin not yet damp with tuberculosis, how wonderful this vision of my still-living name among instant old Romania, village apparition, but her light did not touch the pool of our blankets, I did not see her mouth moving through the shreds of my clothes caught in the forest canopy. *You are safe, you are cared for*, you said when I was on top of you and couldn't see the crows shake their soft black heads. All of the good women had left already—this wasn't fair to you either. Day coughed into night and it was too late for me to leave the forest and you had all of the good women and God in a cart waiting for you on the road. And my future self could see this from a glass city, not yet soaked with pneumonia, with the ghost of my namesake cousin, we had just reached through and pulled me out of those woods but when I told you, I said the thing and you balked. *I can't save you*, you said, and there I was again on a blanket in the forest and you were leaving, everyone was leaving,

you felt unsuccessful. You left, our eyes wild, our yellow  
teeth, all of us gleaming at you. The forest I pulled  
around me, though neither the trees nor the road  
were safe for women like me.

## ***Curse for Bright Light***

*“For years, the CIA used a government building — codenamed “Bright Light” — as a makeshift prison for its most valuable detainees . . . before they were ultimately transferred to Guantanamo Bay . . . Unlike the CIA’s facility in Lithuania’s countryside or the one hidden in a Polish military installation, [Bright Light] in Romania was not in a remote location. It was hidden in plain sight, a couple blocks off a major boulevard on a street lined with trees and homes, along busy train tracks . . . The CIA shipped in Halal [sic] food to the site from Frankfurt, Germany, the agency’s European centre for operations. Halal meat is prepared under religious rules similar to kosher food.”*  
— “Inside Romania’s secret CIA prison.” *The Independent*, 8 December 2011

No one asked questions. It was perfect—hide one government

within another. You kept it simple—water and electricity. Threatened their mothers,

then pointed to the benevolent clock. Complained your assignment wasn’t *glamorous*, that they kept you

inside, too. No one ever thinks they might be the serpent. In the next world,

may water and electricity turn away from you. May you be brought to a place

everyone swears could not exist. *Impossible,*  
*impossible.* May they decline

to comment. When you resist,  
let them say *we checked your teeth,*

*we fed you*

as they confiscate your memory of the ocean  
while everyone around you nods,

bored of seeing your  
orange jumpsuit  
on the news.

## *You Are My Hiding Place*

The hole in the floor is old, old, old country.

It lives under the kitchen table, yawns wide

while the family eats, wider still when they starve.

Cold above, so below. When the horses march up to the house,

the hole—it has teeth—they chatter. Grandma says the hole  
is where the women go when the Russians come.

Paramutation of hoofbeats. Epigenetic fur hats.

A long tablecloth, white-knit lace

brushing the floor.

If a black boot peeks under the lace.

If a sharp woolen shoulder leans down, suspects  
a wooden floor, a hidden circle. Or

a dirt floor, a carefully dirt-covered  
lid. If anyone sneezes. If a leather glove

lifts the lace, folds  
the hole

into a tiny helix, leaves a switch  
on a molecule, leaves

a boot print in a bomb shelter,  
a gold button in the basement.

If a woman opens her hand decades later, reaches  
for something, brushes away

webs of dust, stares  
miles down

into the sudden circle  
in her palm, says

*What the  
hell is this*

*Return & Revive Us*

No one ever thinks they might be  
the dragon.

Everyone wants to swing the  
lance around, divine stomp.

A legion names itself  
*protector*, prince among angels—

nested in green  
shirts, scales on a beast.

Calls itself *iron*. Declares its task  
*guarding*. Another legion

wraps itself in yards and yards of cloth,  
whispers the name of that very

same deliverer. The archangel Michael

is confounded—intervenes  
and appears, yanks humans out of the mouth

of the eternal lion as fast  
as they throw themselves

in. *Archistrategos* is a web of light pulled  
in the directions of his sparks. Starts

one fire. Beseeched to put it out again. Covers his ears,  
leaves red handprints. Nobody thinks

they could ever be the serpent.  
*Who is like God?*

## ***Every Name Means Across the River***

*“Govern there as if Romania had been ruling these territories for two million years. What will happen afterward, we’ll see...”*  
— Dictator Ion Antonescu to Gheorghe Alexianu, head of the occupation regime of Transnistria, December 6, 1941

Dear cousins  
Your labour camp  
is its own republic

The mass grave wants  
its independence

The Soviets still  
reach their long  
arm across the river—

Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh,  
South Ossetia. Statues of dead  
men who made

your dead  
are everywhere

When you hold your ear  
above the river you can hear footsteps  
pacing around and

around the Black Sea. Transnistria  
has its own president

the same way Dachau  
is a town—Dachau has always  
been a town. It was easier

to visit. Children rode  
their tricycles around and

around the camp. The nuns—  
there were nuns there—they had taken a vow  
of silence, a gold cross silent

on the roof, their long habits  
sweeping the silent ground

## *Typhus*

God forbid—it's a terrible  
way to go. Vector of rats

and possums, lice and fleas. *Jail fever. Hazy  
delirium.* I have lived in the city long

enough to learn a few things DDT  
was good for. I learn that the Nazis got so angry

at the Romanians because they just left the dead  
Jews in piles, didn't bury or burn them, and we

spread typhus into the groundwater, then to the Nazis.  
Because I am gay I don't believe in disease as metaphor

or punishment. It is hard to know what to believe  
anymore. It is hard to be the people on

either side of the conspiracy—the moon landing  
is not the same as the opioid crisis is not the same as

a docile forest monster, not the same as the CIA. I had hoped  
to not grow up to be an old woman writing haltingly to some

church to say *We regret to inform you that your archbishop  
was a Nazi*, but here we are. It is hard to learn anything

at first about typhus because I have to scroll through  
the weeds of fascists saying *no no, it was all just*

*the disease, no one was ever made to dig their own grave  
in the trees. Through the screen I can hear hundreds*

*of miniature online Reagans laughing  
at each briefing about AIDS, like It's not murder*

*if everyone gets sick.*

## *Europe Eats Itself*

Europe inhales sharp and folds in  
on itself. Its shoulder is a triple cross

stamped with iron, one elbow  
is a flag

held the wrong way  
on purpose. Europe has no teeth

left, gnaws its leg, eats itself  
dead. A regime explodes,

becomes a statue, becomes a ruin,  
becomes a joke. Then it kills

you. A border grows a fence,  
a fence grows a hole, a hole for endless

cars and cigarettes and taxes  
and weapons and people, becomes

a weapon itself, was always  
a weapon. Becomes the Mediterranean.

How is anyone going to swim  
in that ever again? I can't stop thinking about

the kid I remember from  
history class who could take apart

an AK-47 in thirty seconds.

We all thought,

*dope*