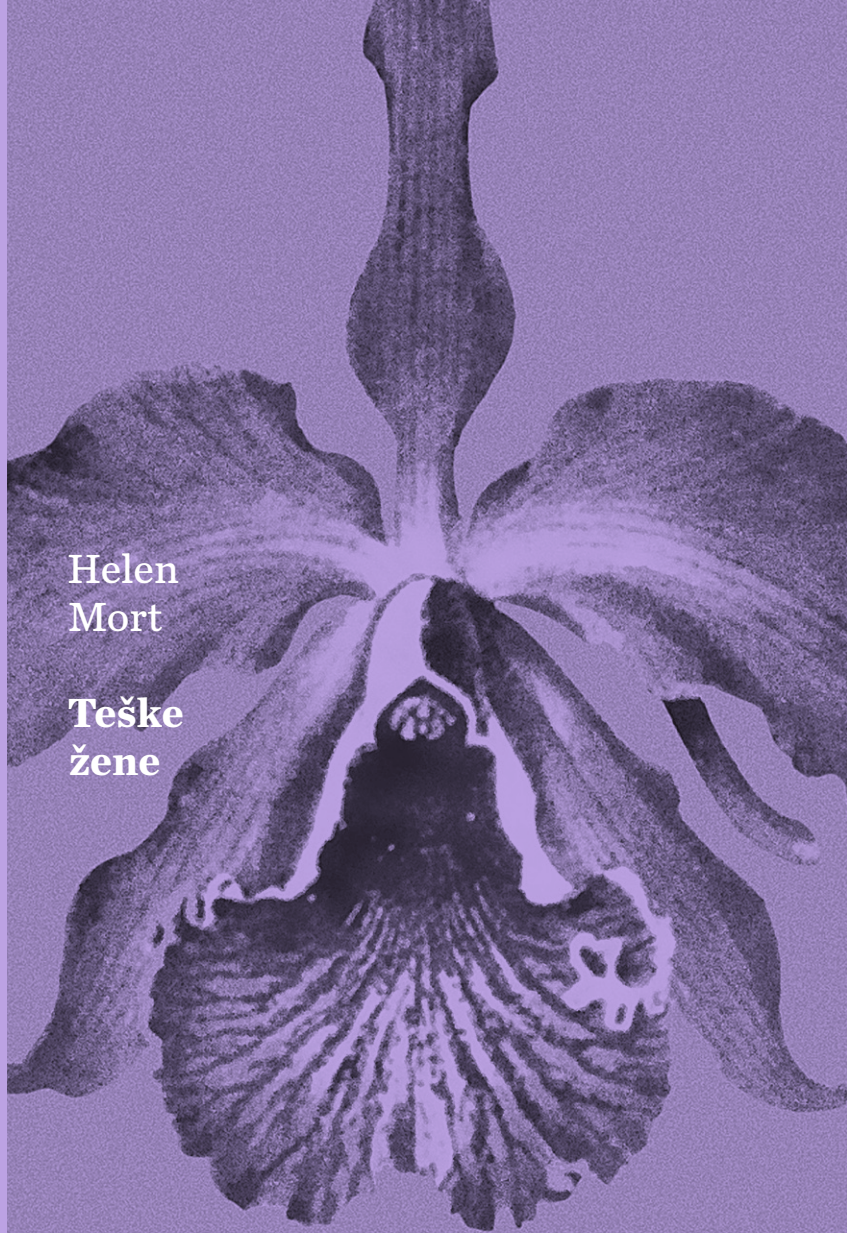


Helen Mort **Teške žene**

Helen
Mort

**Teške
žene**

skupina



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Zagreb, 2020.





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Mort

**Teške
žene**

S engleskoga preveo
Goran Čolakhodžić

Planina

Vrlo si uspješna,
ali imaš kamenje u prsima,

pješčenjak boje kože
uglavljen na mjesto dojki.

Tvoj je trbuh komad stijene.
Kako bi te održale, i noge ti postaju kamene.

Zakopčavaš jaknu
i nitko ne zamjećuje da si planina.

Kupuješ kavu,
vodiš sastanke uprave gdje nitko ne izgovara

da si od sipine,
ali iznad tvoje glave njihov razgovor je vrijeme,

tvoje oči sabiru svježu kišu
i ti znaš što jesi jer

kao svaka padina
ti ne spavaš. Tvoja bi te stopala mogla držati ovdje

zauvijek, ali obronci
ti se mrve, a kad progovoriš

tvoje riječi su odron, ti si
u strahu da ti se srce kotrlja iz usta.

Moja dijeta

Moja dijeta dolazi uz besplatnu vilicu. Služi da se probušiš kao pečenicu pa da sve uzaludne riječi izađu iz tebe, ovako. Moja je Shackletonova dijeta, jedu se vlastite cipele ¹. Dijeta Everest, u kojoj ti omrzline ekstremitete čine laganima. Po mojoj dijeti, smiješ jesti, ali samo zatvorenih očiju. Moja dijeta nalik je kotaču vrlo malog bicikla, rotira brzo. To je dijeta-cjedilo: probereš rupe i pojedeš ih. Moja dijeta je dijeta ugljenokopa Južnog Yorkshirea. Ne uključuje ništa, osim male isprike. Po mojoj dijeti, smiješ jesti vlastitu prošlost, vrlo oprezno, kao da grickaš ugao fotografije. Moja dijeta je Sabor u Wormsu ². Smiješ jesti samo vjerske skupove iz šesnaestog stoljeća. Moja dijeta je dijeta plesača koji ne zna plesati. Moja dijeta je veća od tvoje dijete i to me straši. Moja dijeta je samoodrživa. Ako hoćeš, možeš početi jesti sebe, polako, počevši iznutra.

1 Ernest Shackleton (1874.–1922.), polarni istraživač i avanturist, vođa triju antarktičkih ekspedicija početkom 20. st.

2 eng. Diet of Worms, što daje neprevodivu igru riječi, budući da može značiti i "prehrana crva"

Teške

“Sam Bog zna da ima teških žena. Žena koje su – ponekad – plitke, zlobne, sebične, neiskrene i, dakako, lude.” – AskMen vodič kroz teške žene

Teške žene nije briga koliko je sati, one zakrčuju autobusnu postaju svojim teškim tijelima, odbijajući se maknuti lakima, ili u parkovima vuku svoju težinu za sobom kao debeo pas. Neke od njih trče, bicikliraju ili još gore, voze auto. Ako te teška žena udari pri 50 na sat imaš 50 posto šanse da preživiš. Kod kuće, teške su žene više kao zidovi nego kao prozori, ali ako se osloniš o jednu, propadneš ravno kroz nju i one ponekad noću pokažu tvoje lice.

Teške žene ne znaju da se rađaju.
Teške žene ne znaju značenje te riječi.
Jedna ti je možda presavijena u novinama, drži svoje dojke kao naranče. Možda ima neka koja ti nosi kavu, ili ti se useljava u ulicu. U Londonu, kaže se, nikad nisi više od 6 stopa daleko od teške žene. Jeste li vi ili vaš kolega imali tešku ženu u posljednjih 6 mjeseci? Ako da, možda imate pravo na odštetu. Imate li s našim pitanjima poteškoća? Je li vas strah da ste i sami možda teški?

Brdo

Kad god na tebe pomislim, ti si na pola puta uz brdo na
koje se nikad
još nisi popeo. Jesen je, dimnjaci doline Calder dišu
svjetlost,

bukve oponašaju neki kutak noći — crna debla,
razmaci između njih sitni hvati neba.

Ovdje gore, šetnje koje nisi poduzeo postaju precizne,
neponištene i sigurne, stišću se kao pesnica dana.

Iako sam sedam gora dalje, htjela bih ti reći
da negdje na karti mora biti ravnica

za koje ne znamo, gradića s imenima koja nitko ne zna
popisati
i običnih, skrivenih jezera, samotani oblak nimalo sličan
listu.

Želim reći, mora biti boljih načina da se stvari izreknu,
nepisanih putova, kamenitih staza koje treba premašiti,
riječi

vježbati dok ne ispadnu grube. I s ove visine
i na ovom nagnutom, jorkširskom tlu to se čini dovoljno.

Rachel u Attercliffeu

Nosim haltere, radim na Stjepanovo.
Tvoj tata, tvoj dečko skoknu na pivo
pa pokazuju niz Derek Dooley Way.
Znak vani kaže *ulaz je straga*.
Oko gelendera je zimzelen, po jedna zvijezda
iznad vrata spavaćih soba. Ja sam grimizna do kukova.
Puštam ih da odignu slojeve i otkopčaju mi grudnjak.
Brbljavi su, pričaju mi što su im djeca
jučer dobila. Smiješim se. Svog sina ne spominjem.
Ponekad kažem da radim u duševnom zdravlju.
Oni koji su šutljivi kad dođu
najviše me intrigiraju. Morao bi se smijati sebi.
Volim misliti da ima neka bolnica, nedavno umrla žena.
Volim misliti da nekome spašavam život.

Ablacija

U bolnici Northern General
pokušavaju ti spaliti
komadićak srca.

Želim znati koji,
koliko
i što čuva.

Moja pitanja žive
između onog što liječnici zovu srcem
i onog što mi njime mislimo,

to je široko kao procjep između mozga i uma.
U našoj lozi bajpasiranih srca,
trebali bismo biti zahvalni

na doslovnom. Znam da je moje srce
tvoje srce — dobro za trčanje,
ne baš za drugo

i kasnije kad se uspraviš u svom posuđenom krevetu
sve promašim,
nazovem je oblacija. Prinos

ili žrtva. Kao da si nešto prepustio.
Kao da je njihova sićušna vatra obredna
i da se uz nju možemo ogrijati.

Jeleni

Jeleni za koje se moja majka kune Bogom da ih nismo vidjeli,
oni koji su koračali između drveća
na papcima boje kovanice od funte,
spominjala sam ih o svakoj užini za praznike

i postajali su od toga sjajniji svaki put;
podatniji od vidri koje smo čekali
u Ullapoolu, graciozniji od vodomara
koji je probadao rijeku južno od vrištine Rannoch.

Pet godina poslije, u toj istoj kući, ustala sam
po vodu usred noći i promatrala
svoju majku na prozoru, kako gleda van
tamo gdje šuma oplakuje granicu vrta.

S mjesta gdje je stajala, vidjela sam kako se prikradaju
kroz borove i morali su biti bliže
nego prije, jer nisam nikako pamtila od ranije
ta rebra kao riblju kost, to grubo krzno

njihove oči, kao njezine, koje su sijevale unatrag
prema nečemu što ih je slijedilo.

Gđica Heath

Sa sedamdeset, naša učiteljica plesa
i dalje je mogla izvesti
savršen *pas des chats*.

Njezin je francuski na sjeveru
propadao. Stajali smo u vrsti
ponavljajući *parr-durr-shat*

ili se smijuljili
dok je čekala napeta i spremna
desnicom udarajući dobe

po kuku, očima
izbjegavajući naše. Nikad nije
stupila na daske.

Trebalo mi je dvadeset godina
da shvatim. Sama noćas
i daleko od doma

u cipelama koje mi žuljaju prste
do krvi, leđa
ispravljenih baletno ravno,

čekam kao ona, previše ustrašena
da uđem u bar
gdje svi su stranci,

vidim je gdje klizi
preko gradske noći
meni ususret, visoka i bijela

i vitka. Korak iza mene,
ona pucka prstima. Elegantna,
ona na mene računa.

Ljepota

*“...nije drugo do početak užasa” — Rilke*³

Kad mi je niz cestu zaglavinjala Ljepota, kucnula na vrata,
vidjela sam je iz boravka i skrila se — oči su joj bile crvene
od dima, obrazi kao tijesto od mjesta gdje je plakala
i gore od toga, nije mi se sviđalo njezino društvo:
rumeni pijanac što na uzlu vuče jazavčara.
Usta su joj visjela. Nije rekla ništa,
samo stajala i čekala, u moje ruže pepeo otresala,
ali dok su odlazili, okrenula je sporo glavu.
Mada joj se lice profinilo od kiše,
rekla sam si: na nju neću misliti, nikad više.

Uostalom, sljedeću sam godinu provela pijući u “Kruni”.
Jedne subote, ustala sam baš kad su došli i sjeli.
Nosila je šešir. Oči su joj bile svjetlije no prije,
(mada nisam sumnjala da sam baš nju vidjela,
ustajalo svjetlo oko ramena joj kao šal,
njena silueta oštro crtana na zidu)
i premda sam zgrabila kaput, stala sam, oklijevajući.
Znala sam da moram pitati kako se zove.
Konačno izusti. A meni se na to digne kosa na glavi:
ne uzmičemo mi pred licem, već kad se ime javi.

Djevojka iz susjedstva

Prvo je došla posuditi šećer. Nedjeljom popodne
užicala bi pola litre mlijeka, ponekad cigaretu,
onda pozdravila suton u svom zaraslom vrtu
ispuhujući u moj kolutove dima. Uskoro je brala

nezrele jabuke s mogega stabla ili me molila za knjige
izlizanih hrptova koje bi joj zapele za oko. Nasmiješila bih
se i kimnula.

Zvonila bi noću kasno na vrata. Zastore sam navlačila,
kupaonski prozor zatvarala kapkom,

a iznoseći smeće vidjela bih obris
u njezinoj kuhinji, glave nagnute unatrag, onako kako
stojim ja.

Jednom se okrenula i pogledala me u oči. Danas
svoju plavu kosu šiša kratko. Pronalazim izgovore

da ne izađem iz kuće; večernju kišu,
ledeni vjetar. Prošle je noći rekla moje ime.
Pristaje joj.

Division street

Doveo si me ovamo da se pohvatamo
jednog sparnog utorka. Spremala se oluja,
golubovi glatki od kiše.
Moj crni kišobran protegnuo je krila.
Mokre kože, krenula sam k jatu
barova gdje parovi premeću bijele tablete
s jezika na jezik, lako kao rosulja,
tvoji prsti u mojoj kosi,
način na koji si gotovo prošvercao
malo nečeg u moju krv.

U klinici, pitali su me imam li tetovaža.
Pomislila sam na salon
žućkastih zidova, cap-cap cvilež
igle koja točkā kost i, na trenutak,
gotovo poželjela da si ostavio trag;
neupadljiv kao zvijezda koju prekrivam majicom,
sjećanje na kišu, ili tvoj hod spuštene glave,
uz Division Street, sporiji svakog tjedna, zastaješ
uz pubove, prozori im tako mutni da vidiš
jedino svoj odraz.

Tollaidh

Na Novu godinu, spustili smo se
u jezero — ja, zabrtvljena u sivo plivačko odijelo,
ti u kupaćim gaćama, hodao si
sve dok ti voda nije stisnula noge prečvrsto.

Plivala sam do sredine, lomila
ledeno zrcalo u samom srcu i kad su mi pluća
gotovo stala i zagrabila sam natrag na kopno,
ti si bio gol na obali, okrenut

od mene, niski plamenovi vrijeska
oko tvojih gležnjeva, plavi ručnik u ruci.
Čak i u utrnulim kostima, umrlim vršcima
prstiju, znala sam tvoju težinu i toplinu,

koliko sam željela da se okreneš,
željela krajolik tvojega tijela –
onako kako smo, satima ranije, stajali
na niskoj stazi, gledali prema Sliochu,

ne trebajući biti ondje, samo bez daha
i sretni što se odiže zastor od oblaka,
staza vijuga sve dalje od nas,
uvelo zlatno svjetlo. Taj prizor.

Komadićci

I tako ti dajem ovaj komadićak,
ovaj odrešćić sunca, ovaj listić
suncokretnog jantara, jednu šipku
jesenjeg svjetla. Dajem ti ovaj komadićak
jer je samo dio cjeline
jer živi u svijetu kao što to zlato
nikada ne može, jer je morsko-
obiteljska nedjeljna uspomena, boje
50. godišnjice braka,
jer je najbolji dio svake
beskrajne noći petka, središte
svakoga stola, dijeljeno s prijateljima
čije oči nikad neće sjati tako žarko
kao sada. Jer je poklon
kao šetnja s rukom u ruci, zapešće dok
dira zapešće, jer u sebi drži okus
previše soli, previše octa od slada
kao ljubavi otvoren dlan, ili ljubavi stisnuta šaka
koja zna ne pustiti prerano,
jer, iznutra, on je blijeda površina
Mjeseca, stotina mjesta
kamo se nije još putovalo. Jer
uvijek ću dijeliti ovu toplinu,
ovaj zadnji bus kući, ovaj život
s tobom.

Jabuke

U tvom poludivljem vrtu
moj druidski prijatelj
objavio je *stablo jabuke*
gdje ti uzgajaš šljive.

Zagrizla sam jezik
kao da znam razmak
između onog što sadimo
i svega što to postane.

Kišilo je toga ljeta
svakog tjedna dok te nije bilo,
listovi meko hvatali
pola neba. Svakog dana

pokušavala sam te zamisliti
ležeći na razvučenom dvosjedu,
misli gorkoslatkih kao kora,
u grlu mi oštrina jabukovače.

Sjela sam pored stabla i zamalo-
pisala, dok mi ljeto
nije ostavilo potpis preko kože.
Sad evo me – rujan

pored tvojeg kuhinjskog prozora,
gledam jesen gdje spaljuje granama
vrške, nova mi tišina
i slatkoća šljiva na usnama.

Plin i zrak

Dok drijema, moj se sin drži za dudu varalicu
kao planinar što koristi kisik. Da,
toliko je ozbiljan — on je penjač u termo-odijelu, bori se
udahnuti rjetkoću, krećući se novim područjem
visoko iznad granice snijega, dalje od rutinskog svijeta.

Ili je ja, dok sam stiskala crijevo s plinom i zrakom
one noći dok sam se borila da ga rodim,
zamalo se utopila u bubrežastom bazenu
Kraljevske bolnice, tijelo napinjući, tiskajući
nekamo daleko izvan kontrole. Sklopila sam oči,

pravila se da sam zavezana, pratila sunce
na Ama Dablamu, K2, Everestu, zamišljala
da mogu stajati na krovu sebe,
držeći zastavu svoje krvi i gledati dolje,
kroz kosti i tetive i placentu

i kad su mi oduzeli plin, plakala sam
kao netko tko je okrenuo leđa vrhuncu,
prisiljen spustiti se niz ledom teške oblike
planina, serake i mostove od snijega, penjače
koje opkoljuju u zamke, njihovu čudnu bremenitost,

očeve i majke, kćeri
i sinove izblanjane do femura i fibula,
kralježaka i lubanja, svedenih na potencijal,
na tvrdoću, na sve one dijelove
koje je hladnoća smatrala najjačima.

Kukuvija

Manja nego sam mislila i boje oblaka, tiha
kroz svijetlo dnevno nebo kod Bamford Edgea,
u brišućem letu s vršaka lišća na plot.

Ne razabirem teksturu njena perja, koru
njenih kandži, samo da je sigurno izgladnjela
kad lovi tako rano, ulijeće hitro u limenu staju.

Ne znam zašto kažem “ona”, kao što ne znam
kako da joj utažim glad. Uskoro moj sin
plaće u autu kao mali ptić,

u dojkama me bocka i dolazi mlijeko,
sablasi blijedo, kao kukuvija. Ima pernatu jaknu,
ugniježđen je u plavom kaputiću. Hranim ga

prignuta u vozačkom sjedalu, sova počiva
daleko u krajoliku svoje oskudice. Tko mi je ono
ispričao priču o trogodišnjem dječaku

spašenom tjednima pošto se izgubio u šumi?
Rekao je majci da je nad njim bdjelo krilato biće
noću, sagradilo mu šuštav krevet od lišća.

Istina je mliječna stvar, rjetkoća kroz drveće.
Ne mogu je slijediti jer držim svojeg sina.
Nadam se samo da će ga ovaj svijet nahraniti.

Alfie

Što ti nova mogu reći?
Ništa o željeznim brezama
i ništa o smirenoj ruci
grabljivice koja je nada mnom letjela

dok sam hodala, unutra te noseći
sve dok nisam pomislila da smo lutka
koja se ljuljuška na zelenom brijegu, a ona,
gospodarica, povlači srebrne niti.

Ništa o drhtanju mog trbuha
noću dok udaraš ili hvataš,
o lakoći tvojih novih kostiju,
o rastućoj boli tebe. Mogu reći

nešto o tvom ocu
kojeg čuješ, a nikada ne vidiš.
Reći, na primjer, da su mu ramena
bujad i topli pijesak,

da su mu oči očeve,
da sam mu kosu ošišala kratko u crvenoj
kuhinji, lako mu dodirujući uši.
No moj je jezik umoran, pa ti pružam

tišinu otvorenih vrata
ili ti govorim kao nešto što sam čula
jednom u tapkanju ponoćne kiše
i nikad naučila ponoviti.



Helen
Mort

**Difficult
Women**

Mountain

You are very successful
but you have rocks in your chest,

skin-coloured sandstone
wedged where your breasts should be.

Your stomach is a boulder.
To hold you up, your legs grow stony too.

You zip your jacket up
and nobody notices you are a mountain.

You buy coffee,
run board meetings where no-one says

you're made of scree
but above your head, their talk is weather,

your eyes collect new rain
and you know what you are because

like any hillside
you don't sleep. Your feet could hold you here

forever but your sides
are crumbling, and when you speak

your words are rockfall, you're
scared your heart is tumbling from your mouth.

My diet

My diet comes with a free fork. You use it to puncture yourself like a barbecue sausage so all the wasted breath comes out of you, like this. Mine is the Shackleton Diet, you eat your boots. The Everest Diet, where frostbite lightens your extremities. On my diet, you can eat but only with your eyes shut. My diet is like the wheel of a very small bicycle, rotating fast. It's the colander diet: you pick out the gaps and eat them. My diet is the South Yorkshire Coalfields diet. It includes nothing but a small apology. On my diet, you can eat your own past, very carefully, like nibbling the corner of a photograph. My diet is the Diet of Worms. You can only eat religious assemblies from the sixteenth century. My diet is the diet of a dancer who can't dance. My diet is bigger than your diet and that's what scares me. My diet is self-sustaining. If you like, you may begin to eat yourself, slowly, starting from inside.

Difficult

“God knows there are difficult women out there. Women who are - at times — shallow, bitchy, selfish, dishonest and, of course, crazy.” — The AskMen guide to difficult women

Difficult women don't care what time it is, they're crowding the bus stop with their difficult bodies, refusing to budge for the light, or in the parks, dragging their difficulty behind them like a fat dog. Some of them are running, cycling, or worse, driving cars. If a difficult woman hits you at 30 miles per hour you have a 50 percent chance of survival. At home, difficult women are more like walls than windows but if you lean on one, you fall straight through and sometimes at night they show your face.

Difficult women don't know they're born.
Difficult women don't know the meaning of the word.
There could be one folded into your newspaper, holding her breasts like oranges. There might be one carrying your coffee, or moving to your road. In London, it's said you're never more than 6 feet from a difficult woman. Have you or a colleague had a difficult woman in the last 6 months? If so, you may be entitled to compensation. Do you have difficulty with our questions? Are you afraid you may be difficult yourself?

Hill

Each time I think of you, you're halfway up a hill you've
never
climbed before. Autumn, the Calder Valley chimneys
breathing light,

the beech trees mimicking a corner of night - black trunks,
the spans between them tiny measures of the sky.

Up here, the walks you haven't taken grow precise,
undone and certain, tightening like the hand of the day.

Although I'm seven hills away, I'd like to tell you
somewhere on the map there must be plains

we do not know about, towns with names no-one can list,
and ordinary, hidden lakes, a single cloud shaped nothing
like a leaf.

I mean to say there must be better ways of putting things,
unwritten routes, stone-knuckled paths to overshoot,
words

practiced till they come out rough. And from this height,
and on this tilted, Yorkshire earth it seems enough.

Rachel in attercliffe

I'm in suspenders, working Boxing Day.
Your dad, your boyfriend nips out for a beer
then indicates down Derek Dooley Way.
The sign outside says *entrance at rear*.
There's tinsel round the bannister, a star
above each bedroom door. I'm crimson to my hips.
I let them lift the layers and unhook my bra.
They're talkative, telling me what the kids
got yesterday. I smile. I don't mention my son.
Sometimes, I say I work in mental health.
The ones who're silent when they come
intrigue me most. You have to laugh at yourself.
I like to think there's hospital, a recently-dead wife.
I like to think I'm saving someone's life.

Ablation

Inside the Northern General
they're trying to burn away
a small piece of your heart.

I want to know which bit,
how much
and what it holds.

My questions live
between what doctors call the heart
and what we mean by it,

wide as the gap between brain and mind.
And in our lineage of bypassed hearts
we should be grateful

for the literal. I know my heart
is your heart - good for running,
not much else

and later as you sit up in your borrowed bed
I get the whole thing wrong,
call it *oblation*. Offering

or sacrifice. As if you'd given something up.
As if their tiny fire was ritual
and we could warm by it.

Deer

The deer my mother swears to God we never saw,
the ones that stepped between the trees
on pound coin-coloured hooves,
I'd bring them up each teatime in the holidays

and they were brighter every time I did;
more supple than the otters we waited for
at Ullapool, more graceful than the kingfisher
that darned the river south of Rannoch Moor.

Five years on, in that same house, I rose
for water in the middle of the night and watched
my mother at the window, looking out
to where the forest lapped the garden's edge.

From where she stood, I saw them stealing
through the pines and they must have been closer
than before, because I had no memory
of those fish-bone ribs, that ragged fur

their eyes, like hers, that flickered back
towards whatever followed them.

Miss Heath

At seventy, our dance mistress
could still perform
a perfect *pas des chats*.

Her French was wasted
in the north. We stood in line
repeating *parr-durr-shat*

or sniggered
as she waited in the wings,
her right hand beating time

against her hip, her eyes
avoiding ours. She never
made the stage.

It took me twenty years
to understand. Alone tonight
and far from home

in shoes that pinch my toes
until they bleed, my back
held ballerina straight,

I wait as she did, too afraid
to walk into a bar
where everyone's a stranger,

see her glide
across the city night
to meet me, tall and white

and slim. A step behind,
she clicks her fingers. Elegant,
she counts me in.

Beauty

“... is nothing but the beginning of terror” — Rilke

When Beauty stumbled down my road, tapped at my door
I saw her from the lounge and hid — her eyes were raw
from smoke, her cheeks like dough from where she'd wept
and worse, I didn't like the company she kept:
a red-faced drunk who towed a dachshund on a string.
Her mouth was slack. She never said a thing,
just stood and waited, dropped ash in my rose bed,
though as they walked away, she slowly turned her head.
For all she had a face made delicate by rain,
I told myself I'd never think of her again.

Besides, I spent the next year drinking in The Crown.
One Saturday, I rose to leave as they sat down.
She wore a hat. Her eyes were brighter than before,
(although I didn't doubt that it was her I saw,
the stale light slung across her shoulders like a shawl,
her silhouette drawn sharp against the wall)
and though I grabbed my coat, I stood and stalled.
I knew I had to ask what she was called.
At last she spoke. I felt my hair rise all the same:
it's not the face we shrink from but the name.

The girl next door

First, she came to borrow sugar. Sunday afternoons
she'd cadge a pint of milk, sometimes a cigarette,
then greet the sunset in her overgrown back garden,
blowing smoke rings into mine. Soon she took

the unripe apples from my tree or asked for books
with tattered spines that caught her eye. I'd smile and nod.
She'd ring the doorbell late at night. I kept my curtains drawn,
the bathroom window lidded with a blind,

and taking out the bins I'd see her silhouette
in her kitchen, head tipped back, the way I stand.
Once, she turned to look me in the eye. These days
she wears her blonde hair short. I find excuses

not to leave the house; the evening rain,
the biting wind. Last night she said my name.
It suited her.

Division street

You brought me here to break it off
one muggy Tuesday. A brewing storm,
the pigeons sleek with rain.
My black umbrella flexed its wings.
Damp-skinned, I made for the crush
of bars, where couples slip white pills
from tongue to tongue, light as drizzle,
your fingers through my hair,
the way you nearly sneaked
a little something in my blood.

At the clinic, they asked if I'd tattoos.
I thought about the parlour
with its jaundiced walls, the knit-knit whine
of needle dotting bone, and, for a moment,
almost wished you'd left your mark;
subtle as the star I cover with t-shirts,
the memory of rain, or your head-down walk
along Division Street, slower each week, pausing
by the pubs, their windows so dim you see
nothing but your own reflection.

Tollaidh

On New Year's Day, we lowered ourselves
into the loch - me, sealed in a grey wetsuit,
you in swimming trunks, walking
until the water clenched your legs too tight.

I pushed out to the centre, broke
the chill mirror at its heart and when my lungs
near-stopped and I arced back for land,
you were naked on the shoreline, facing

away from me, the small-flamed heather
at your ankles, blue towel in one hand.
Even in my numb bones, dead fingertips,
I knew the weight and warmth of you,

how much I wanted you to turn around,
wanted the landscape of your body -
the way, hours earlier, we stood
on the low path, looked out towards Slioch,

not needing to be there, just breathless
and glad for the lifted curtain of the cloud,
the track winding away from us,
the off-gold light. The sight of it.

Chips

And so I give you this chip,
this off-cut of the sun, this slip
of sunflower-amber, single bar
of autumn light. I give you this chip
because it is only a part-of-the-whole
because it lives in the world as gold
never can, because it is a seaside-
family-Sunday memory, the colour
of a 50th wedding anniversary,
because it is the best part of each
endless Friday night, the centre
of each table, shared with friends
whose eyes will never burn as bright
as they do now. Because it is a gift
like walking hand-in-hand, wrist-touching-
wrist, because it holds the taste
of too much salt, too much malt vinegar
like love's open palm, or love's closed fist
which knows not to let go too soon,
because, inside, it is the pallid surface
of the moon, a hundred places
not yet travelled to. Because
I'll always share this warmth,
this last-bus-home, this life
with you.

Apples

In your half-wild garden
my Druid friend
announced *apple tree*
where you were growing plums.

I bit my tongue
as if I knew the gap
between the stuff we plant,
all it becomes.

It rained that summer
every week you were away,
the leaves soft-catching
half a sky. Each day

I'd try to picture you,
lie on the sofa bed,
thoughts bittersweet as peel,
a cider-sharpness in my throat.

I sat beside the tree and almost-
wrote, till summer
left its signature across my skin.
Now here I am - September

by your kitchen window,
watching autumn burn the branches
at their tips, new silence
and plum-sweetness on my lips.

Gas and air

When he naps, my son holds his dummy
like a mountaineer using oxygen. Yes,
he's so serious — he's a climber in a down suit, fighting
to inhale a thinness, moving through new territory
high above the snow line, beyond the routine world.

Or he's me, clutching that tube of gas and air
the night I struggled to give birth to him,
nearly drowned in the kidney-shaped pool
in the Royal Hospital, body tensing, pushing
somewhere far beyond control. I closed my eyes,

pretended I was roped up, following the sun
on Ama Dablam, K2, Everest, imagining
I could stand on the roof of myself,
holding the flag of my blood and look down,
through bone and sinew and placenta

and when they took the gas from me, I wept
like someone turned away from a summit,
forced to descend through the ice-bulked shapes
of mountains, seracs and snow-bridges, the climbers
they enfold and trap, their strange pregnancy,

fathers and mothers, daughters
and sons whittled to femurs and fibulas,
vertebrae and skulls, reduced to potential,
to hardness, to all the parts
the cold deemed strongest.

Barn owl

Smaller than I thought and cloud-coloured, silent
through the daylight sky by Bamford Edge,
sweeping from leaf-tip to fencepost.

I cannot see the texture of her feathers, bark
of her talons, only that she must be starved
to hunt so early, dart into the corrugated barn.

I do not know why I say 'she' any more than I know
how to sate her hunger. Soon my son
cries from the car like a baby bird

and my breasts prickle and milk comes,
ghostly barn-owl pale. He is dressed in down,
nested in his blue coat. I feed him

hunched in the driver's seat, the owl rests
far in the landscape of her want. Who was it
told me the story of the three year old boy

saved after weeks lost out in the woods?
He told his mother how a winged creature watched over him
by night, built him a rustling bed of leaves.

Truth is a milky thing, a thinness through the trees.
I cannot follow it because I hold my son.
I only hope this world will feed him.

Alfie

What new thing can I say to you?
Nothing about the iron birch trees
and nothing about the steady hand
of the hawk that flew above me

as I walked, carrying you inside,
until I thought we were a puppet
wobbling on the green hill, she
the master, twitching silver strings.

Nothing about the tremor of my belly
at night when you kick or grasp,
the lightness of your new bones,
the growing ache of you. I can say

something about your father
who you hear and never see.
Say, for instance, that his shoulders
are bracken and warm sand

that his eyes are his father's,
that I cut his hair close in the red
kitchen, touching his ears lightly.
But my language is tired, so I give you

the silence of an open door,
or speak to you like something I heard
once in the pattern of night rain
and never learned how to repeat.

On the author

Helen Mort is a poet and novelist. She is a five-times winner of the Foyle Young Poets award, received an Eric Gregory Award from The Society of Authors in 2007, and won the Manchester Poetry Prize Young Writer Prize in 2008. Her collection *Division Street* is published by Chatto & Windus and was shortlisted for the Costa Book Awards and the T. S. Eliot Prize. Her second collection *No Map Could Show Them* was shortlisted for the Banff Mountain Literature Award in Canada. She has published two pamphlets with Tall Lighthouse press. Helen's first novel *Black Car Burning* was published by Random House in April 2019. In June 2018 Mort was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. She lectures in creative writing at Manchester Metropolitan University.

O pjesnikinji

Helen Mort pjesnikinja je i romanospisateljica. Peterostruka je dobitnica nagrade Foyle za mlade pjesnike, nagrade Eric Gregory koju je dodijelilo The Society of Authors u 2007., kao i nagrade za mlade pisce Manchester Poetry Prize 2008. Njezinu je zbirku *Division Street* objavio nakladnik Chatto & Windus te se našla u užem izboru za nagradu Costa Book i nagradu T. S. Eliot. Druga zbirka, *No Map Could Show Them*, našla se u užem izboru za nagradu Banff Mountain Literature Award u Kanadi. Objavila je dvije kratke knjižice pjesama kod Tall Lighthouse Pressa. Helenin prvi roman, *Black Car Burning*, objavio je Random House u travnju 2019. U lipnju 2018. Mort je izabrana u članstvo Kraljevskog književnog društva. Predaje kreativno pisanje na sveučilištu Manchester Metropolitan.

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