

The Summer Night

The summer night is so still, so weightless,
that I can hear and see how moonlight slips into our barn—
laying itself like a silvery ribbon across the haystacks,
the stale buckwheat bread, the young donkey.
A sleepy wasp stirs.
Half-asleep, she slowly lifts her wings—higher and higher—
and I see how the light filters through their fragile mesh,
scattering into lace across her striped back.
Yesterday, He painted a red cross on my right flank.
They say those marked with a cross are sent north,
where the meadows are lusher, the grass greener and the clover sweeter.
That's why I've always waited for this summer night.
Just yesterday, He fed me some prickly salt from His hand—
it stung, but it was sweeter than alfalfa, sweeter than bluegrass, sweeter than clover
because it came from His hand.
He stroked my neck and scratched behind my ear,
just as He did when I was a calf—
Small and frightened, never straying from my mother's side.
Back then, the grass seemed taller and the road to the pasture stretched farther.
Halfway there, my legs would buckle; I'd fall and bawl.
But mother would nudge me from behind,
and I would get up and walk on.
In the meadow, she grazed while I sat in her lilac shade,
watching her white udder swell with milk.
Then I would press my mouth to her heavy breast and drink—
the warm milk running down my neck, dripping into the grass.
As I drank, mother swatted flies away from my damp eyes with her tail.
My leg is numb. I shift onto my other side and hear a twig crack beneath me.
I hope I didn't wake the donkey.
When I was weaned from my mother,
He tied a rope around my neck and led me to pasture each day.
I missed her.
The longing would rise in me with the dawn, and by dusk, it would overflow my chest—

I'd fall and cry my longing out.

But then He would stroke my neck, and slowly, I grew used to His smooth hand,
the way I once grew used to my mother's rough tongue.

A year has passed since that summer.

My cow must have calved by now, and somewhere in the neighboring village
my son is growing— just as sandy-colored and silky as his mother.

Oh, I missed her.

Longing still grew in me with the morning light—
but my heart had grown too.

It could now hold even the heaviest sorrow,
so I no longer fell, and no longer cried.

The night is so quiet, so clear, that I can hear the donkey's breathing
and see the soft vapor rising from his nostrils, dissolving into the blue air.

Soon, I will be in the North, where the meadows are lusher, the grass greener,
the clover sweeter.

I can't sleep.

My heart beats hotter, harder.

And now I know— everything comes in its time.

Everything comes true.

You just have to know how to wait.

The air begins to blush with dawn,
and even through the sweet trembling in my chest,
I feel it rising again—the longing for Him.

Up there, in the North—where the meadows are lusher,
the grass greener, the clover sweeter—
He will come to me in dreams.

A rooster crows.

Morning begins.

I hear His footsteps,
the clink of metal,
the creak of the door.

I lift my head and see Him step into the barn.
In the half-light, His shadow—long and black—
passes over haystacks, lowered horns, backs, walls, the drainage ditch.
In His hands, the rope—my rope.

Joy surges in me.
I want to bellow, stomp my hoof—
but I stay quiet,
because I'm still afraid to wake the donkey.

He's close now.
I see Him clearly.
And I finally understand
that there are no farewells.
There is only love.

May, 2022

Matakh (Armenian: մատաք) — a traditional charitable sacrifice.
Before the slaughter, the animal—always male—is fed blessed salt.