

**Simone INGUANEZ**From *ftit mara ftit tifla*[“water, fire, earth *and P*”]

(Malta: Inizjamed and Midsea Books: 2005)

**alley no 1**

there's a girl peeping – standing in a lane  
 dark flesh gaping mouth hot lips  
 there's naples sicily and sardinia  
 there's crete and athens cyprus and madrid  
 – locked into the look of her fixed eyes  
 there's the steel of sea and fire of voyage  
 there's pain and tears  
 – the moon's turned to sand and the sun is a question  
 heart soul and nothing have become one

*and there's i* - strolling round the coast

close to the old woman who sleeps sitting up – her bed  
 in the door's mouth  
 while she dreams

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**i will return**

you told me *cradle me*  
 and you thought or wished your own mother was found  
 who's been gone a long time  
 – because she was afraid

and you squeezed my hand without quite knowing why  
 – i carry this womb which has never been filled  
 i press these breasts which have never been suckled

– *i will return*

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**barefoot**

i run barefoot on this pier waiting  
for your voice and your gaze i wait –  
between air and water  
where the road starts and you don't know

when you don't come i sow my eyes in the earth

*– i'll see what grows*

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**nymph**

i come from water – dive and surface  
swim dive and surface  
and stay  
– or dart away  
if you come close i'll dart away  
i'm an island

sometimes i rise to light – let go where it sparkles  
water sparkles and water soothes  
– or it blinds  
but my eyes are sealed no body shines in them  
if you move close i'll burst them

i'm a creature of water – water moulded me  
sometimes it lulls me sometimes it wakes me  
waves dance like fire waves dance  
but waves stay coming and going  
– fire does not leave

*if you come near i'll end my life*

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**the first rain**

for you *because you grew on your own*

remember the smell of the first rain  
– which caught you as soon as your feet swung  
and pierced and wet this weak stone and this land  
and burst them  
remember the smell and remember well how it echoed around you  
– silent and shut  
carpets absorbing curtains coughing  
different smells and short colourless skirts  
– they didn't spread it out to drip  
and your bare knees grazed and scratched  
and sweat and chill – between your tight eye-lids  
and the scorching needles at your soles a hole  
and your body stops – and your heart – perhaps your soul as well  
and you grow alone

remember the rain pounding at the window  
– pushing the glass in  
and smearing the white – it's a lie – of your eyes

every time you look straight and deep down  
and glimpse the pupils  
– *adrift in the void*

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**narcissus grows from your hands**

for you *because water fell on your shadow*

i am not – look closer  
and you will not see me  
because i am not  
– except what you make of me  
for you

you try to bind me  
bond on bond knot on knot  
– and each knot tangles you  
ties you ties you so you are entangled

in every cord's knot and you are conceived  
– with me

and you are not – remember  
whether i've ever seen you  
because you are not  
– except what i make of you  
for me

i struggle to grasp you  
i stop racking and knotting  
and i let you  
dissolve

– *into nothing*

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### *Nafra*

in the cavernous temple of your scarlet soul  
the oil lamps flicker  
smoke circles  
the scrawls you leavened  
the yawning heifers you forgot  
the tree of life you sowed and left  
is spreading is growing  
i'm yearning and drowning  
i'm choking  
my chest is tight  
i who danced for the gods  
and for you barely clothed  
i scorch in the chill on an arid land  
listen to me:

*just a breath*  
– why did you leave?

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**her voice in my ears**

yesterday she took me home  
took her clothes off and showed me – singing –  
her wounds one by one her voice pitched high to numb  
the pain in my heart – broken because of her

yesterday – as I lay in her lap  
she told me the stories of her children – who never came  
whom she'd longed for and given birth to alone in her soul  
swaddled and suckled  
yesterday before she left  
and no-one understood – which had come first  
that they didn't understand or that she'd gone I

and I left too without a word  
– *her voice in my ears*

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**this land**

this land in which I was bred is choked by dust  
it is buried by gravel by concrete  
its soul and body crushed  
silence falls valley by valley  
till it's gashed by the scent  
which splits it

my grandpa ploughs my grandpa sows  
my grand pa in his bed must know  
if the beans have grown if the grapes have grown  
if the dahlias are more beautiful  
this winter this scent of fields  
is locked tight in his nostrils failing  
– the olive – the onions next to the hive  
the fennel – and the old fig-tree – and the peach –

they split it  
they split the silence  
ripped valley by valley

shaken body and soul ashes  
 buried under the gravel concrete  
*choked by dust and buried is the land I was bred in*

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### **i wish you smile**

yesterday I found god in your face  
 yesterday – this morning I saw your eyes shine  
 your face fragmented under your light hair  
 I found my soul yesterday  
 in your wide eyes – lashes damp  
 in your mouth – tight and cracked  
*I wish you smile – so the sun can rise*

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for now  
 a ladder resting an ancient wall and pending rain  
 and nuns moving along long corridors  
 tile by tile, step by step  
 – white – black – white – black – white  
 cloud by cloud above their heads  
 music at a distance – someone sneezes  
 and children *bug your grandma*

and i  
*sing granny sing yourself*  
*shut everywhere up tight because time penetrates and I don't know*  
*– it will separate us*  
 not you granny – don't shut yourself leave your eyes  
 wide open because i'm afraid  
 – of the aging smell inside your nostrils and you choose life  
 you want to live—I want

◆ ◆ ◆

and now granny – I feel the rain and am afraid to look into your eyes  
 on the sill there's a knotted rope and a window ajar with no pane  
 and a chair that's hanging outside and the scratched wall's fragrant scent  
 and the chest  
 – i'm noticing that everything in your house – gran – is sepia

and children *fall rain fall* – so that the grass will grow  
holes and lakes and rivers – between your land and this reef  
– they move further away with each breath  
and I call you *granny grandma – ma*  
you cannot – we can't  
lately you're forgetting to feed me you're forgetting to lift me  
  
and I'm frightened granny *i'll dry up*

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### **some day i'll create you**

some day i'll create you ma – to speak to me  
some day i'll create you to see you smile  
we'll run away and spend the night walking and stop sometimes  
and i'll show you the air and water – i've wished for years  
to show them to you  
every time i turn you're not there

some day i'll create you now that you're orphaned  
i wish to nurture you

– *if you let me*

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### **an elegy for my siblings**

and for you *because you startled me*

ma  
the thought of a mother who has dried up hurts  
– it hurts me  
and perhaps it hurts you as well sometimes

my siblings are still locked inside you

– *we're choking them*

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**i left**

i left my country and too much behind me  
– *i cannot die*

there are streets i have wandered  
songs i have sung  
newly-cut flowers which i left  
and a coffee that's cooling and crushed papers by  
crumbs of close by a past which no longer is  
though it lingers  
– in crumbs  
there are yellowing books and candles – candles dripping  
and rain about to pour and sun behind clouds  
and waves ironed out into calmness  
rocks and gravel and sand  
there are reeds which creak and an orphaned seagull  
there are temples and empty spaces shivering  
my mother and father growing wrinkled and old and bent  
my siblings giving birth to me in new blood  
– silent  
sheets pulled back and open roof-doors  
and now night has fallen and dewdrops on my door  
and the tides of grains  
blowing and growing fruit on the branches  
at the end of the alley a cat and a dog which is barking

there is you flirting away  
sms – i hear you laughing from here

– *sometimes i feel you trembling*

\*

**i'll stay**

i don't know not where i'm from  
but i fit into your shores  
their yellowing on the wind  
doesn't hurt –  
nor does their green rustling softly in my ear  
or their salt on the wave –  
to and fro to and fro

i don't know where i'm from

but if you let me – *i'll stay*

\*

**little by little**

you're the word which stuck  
to the tip of my tongue – for years

years in which i sought you without relief  
from the pain it took you to take shape

– *little by little*

*Translated from the Maltese by Maria Grech Ganado*

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