

## Marina Romani

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### Evening on Alvarado Street

Walking in the evening's light rain,  
taking care not to slip on the slick street,  
my sheepskin boots make no sound  
as I happen upon her from behind.  
I've often seen this woman: weighed down  
by bags, she stops, then trudges onward,  
toward home from shopping, I assumed.  
Now, with four bags huddled at her feet,  
she stands at the entry to a futon store  
—a kind of shelter from increasing rain.  
She does not see me—she gazes upward,  
shakes her tight-clenched fists at something,  
or someone, as if in angry furious prayer.

Now it sinks in: she may have no place to go.  
I reach into my pockets, find them empty.  
If I had cash to give, how would I handle it?  
Would she take it? —Middle-aged and tidy,  
she addresses no one: face expressionless,  
she hauls those same four bags in silence,  
a block or so at a time along the same streets,  
puts them down, takes a break, picks them up,  
walks on, somewhere. Anywhere? Nowhere?  
What stops her from begging? Pride? Rejection?  
Despair? Whatever else, it is a deep aloneness.  
That much I know

—her isolation has been mine.

I know the feeling and the darkness of the fear it brings.  
It visits me in deepest dreams. Is it everyone's?

Soon in my car, I drive by the spot I've just passed  
—there she is still, standing, her eyes now turned  
to the window display: fresh new beds nicely made up,  
each one inviting, none accessible to those outside.

The night is cold, it'll be a cold winter.  
I was looking forward to coming home,  
to gifts to myself — fuzzy slippers, a down quilt.  
I'd pad about in the fuzz, make hot tea, curl up in down.  
Can I relish these pleasures when she's penetrated my core,  
embedded her own image into my deepest comforts?

I bundle myself into soft warmth  
—so easy to block out sadness not my own.  
Or is it? I've stepped into the chilling dark.  
Is there no way out for her, for me? For us?

## Still Lives through an Urban Window

—for Elena

The pigeons sit on branches of a tree grown tall  
amid walls of brick and glass that stand here  
shoulder to shoulder to enclose the green patch  
where trash cans stand, the neat square in which  
this tree has lived all the years of its life. The birds'  
day, spent diving for the droppings of humans,  
feeding their own lumpy grey bodies, is done.  
They sit, gorged and still, in twos and in threes,  
hunched, posing as vultures on sprawling branches.

Within the walls of brick and glass, a human  
sits on her own patch, a studio where she has carefully  
arranged every square inch for its function,  
a double one for her—shrink's office and pied-à-terre.  
*Her* day, spent listening to the pains of her fellows,  
pains unimaginable to the hunched sitters outside,  
is done, too. She sits, meditative, on her couch.

Her view of the tree sitters is laced with fire-escapes  
zigging and zagging five stories above and below.  
The aged ladders, mottling opal and blue,  
thread through a red-brown mosaic of brick  
interspersed with framed glimmers of glass,  
and this whole patchwork seems frozen in time  
while a ceiling of blue over white—summer sky  
littered with clouds—unrolls in slow motion above.

On two sides of a thin pane of glass: Distinct lives.

## **Mind Dances**

— *my mind races ahead, my words stumble after me*  
*Virginia Woolf, A Writer's Diary*

As day withdraws and night sidles in  
the mind meanders to dance  
— stretching with languor, it sways, swings  
steps to rhythms released by darkness  
fox-trots through memory flings  
polkas mid giggles and clowns  
waltzes through moonlit romances  
tangoes in throes of passions revived  
floats through stars flaming to flowers  
flies to the smile of the moon.

On a good night the words dance along,  
just a step or two behind.

## **What I can't capture on camera**

is the blue of evening in the moments after sunset  
or rather the many blues along Monterey Bay  
as one white sail glides along liquid blue  
the sea's soft cobalt hue shimmers in stillness  
beneath the sky's lighter pastel'ish colors  
their separateness marked by the clear line  
along which they meet as the hour's partners  
just below and above the beachside park  
where the varied greens of new grasses  
still containing the late sun's warmth  
offer unassuming contrasts

here is where couples stroll, families picnic  
children play in controlled wildness  
in this final hour before bedtime  
and dogs run crazy-happy after flying frizbees

all within a blue transparency, the air itself  
as I move through its veil, quiet and at peace.

## words words words

during some mindless activity  
especially while cooking  
they pop out, those words  
the ones my mother spoke  
in the life that was and now is not  
the life that speaks out loud at times  
unsummoned, unexpected  
—what are the depths in me that store them?

the long diminutives, the russian words  
for cucumber, say  
not *ogurets*—*ogurchik*  
or water, not *voda*—*vodichka*  
not *lozhka*—*lozhechka*, for spoon

the longer word is often the diminutive  
—how odd!  
—what makes its sound the tender one?  
—surely it's my mother's voice  
the names—*Allochka*, *Katiusha*, *Bobchik*, *Busik*

then: *Poolul'* her unexpected nickname  
for my daughter, Elena Alexandra  
it has no meaning, just a sound she found  
—where, why?  
—no matter  
it was a two-tone tune of love  
a grandmother's gentle gift  
Elena's very own.

so many words so long forgotten  
—which one will spring up to surprise me next?  
I do not wait for it  
but will receive it when it comes

in the meantime  
I slice thin my fresh *ogurchik*  
and use a *lozhechka* to stir my tea.

**Marina Romani**, now retired from a couple of careers and as many marriages, lives in Monterey, California, where taking oceanside walks and writing poems are among her greatest pleasures. Her work has appeared in *Homestead Review*, *Porter Gulch Review*, *Monterey Poetry Review*, *Tor House Newsletter*, and *Poetry Pacific*. Marina's first book, *Child Interwoven* (Park Place Publications), a collection of memories in poem and prose of her childhood in 1940s Shanghai, has just been published.

