Karoline Brændjord

Selected poems from *Jeg vil våkne til verden (I want to wake up to the world)*

Translated from the Norwegian by Ingvild Burkey

LANTERN

Work makes everything shine. Grief makes everything shine.

I was born and lit up my parents’ faces.

When I laugh my mother shines,

when I set the table my father shines,

when I pour wine into the glasses the world lights up.

I grow and light flows out through my fingers.

I walk to the brook to fetch water. The brook shines.

And the water I bring back with me shines.

Whatever I touch: Birchbark, grass,

a butterfly, potato sprouts, milk and a stake.

My body is a commandment.

I grow beneath the sky, in flesh and wonder.

I cast the light of my wondering over the field.

All my questions come shining from my mouth,

when I ask the anemone its name, it turns white.

Come to me in my bright world,

here the fields are golden and the rivers sparkle.

I tread a path with my childish steps.

My words are lanterns, my stories are lanterns.

My longings are lanterns. I am the biggest lantern in the world.

I MUST TEACH MY DEAD TO BEHAVE

If my dead had departed with the wind, it would have been beautiful.

If my dead rolled with the waves, my soul would find peace.

If they rose into the heavens with a soft tug of God’s hand

or dissolved into the earth, nourishing the field poppies.

This would have reconciled me to death.

But my dead want to die over and over again

and send me scurrying from desk drawer to desk drawer.

I search for letters with elaborate handwriting.

But my dead don’t write letters.

My dead climb onto a chair and meticulously place the noose around their neck.

A step in the forest is a step in the forest

A mother who has taken her own life is a mother who has taken

her own life, and has one or several children who have a mother

who has taken her own life

The course of nature is beautiful, it isn’t true

When truth is not beautiful and the sound of steps brings no

comfort, I learn to become a bird that can walk on the forest floor

and sleep with one half of the brain at a time

I imitate the warble of a thrush, I learn a silence

no one has created

FAITH

I am the child

of a suicide

The ray which casts art’s lustre

on tragedy

For imagine that madness can leave behind

something mild and comforting

I am mercy

I grieve and despair

with grace

with soft hair flowing down my shoulders

So that madness

will not consume me too

So that no one will see me in the street

with fluttering hair on a windless day

I lie down on the ground and open my mouth wide, so that snow

will fall into my body. The snow melts against the roof of my mouth and

the back of my tongue. I don’t know how to preserve what is

soft.

WIND, WATER

I perched on the straw

swaying back and forth in the wind

I can still feel the straw’s movement in my chest

On the straw I learned how to sing

I opened my mouth, tensed my stomach

and let breath touch me on its way out

I am not as I was

My tongue, my lips and lungs are not the same

since I perched on the straw in the wind

I sing melodies that lift the body

out of the body

and lower it back again filled with joy

I stood on the water

rocking up and down with the waves

I can still feel the movement of the waves in my chest

I can’t get over the water,

it comes as a surprise every day

The water lies there so prettily

mirroring the sky and the hillsides and the trees

I don’t need skin

lying there in the water

with the sky and the hillsides and the trees,

and I can’t get over my reflected image

I want to wake up to the world

VISIT

When I visit the grave she is silent

Not the slightest rustle of leaves does she use for a voice

She no longer runs

no longer bends grasses and weeds under her feet

She does not smile, does not blush, is not angered

When I let the orchids wither she does not complain

She can neither sing, whisper or laugh

as if I had overturned a basket of pearls

She does not think, does not explain, does not understand

She does not rest, does not dream, does not breathe

She is not the sound of the sea in a conch

Not a breeze through a hollow twig

I lay a forget-me-not on her grave

It is my voice

and not the smallest grain of soil does she use for an ear

When I am older than my mother was

I will no longer think of her

as a mother who abandoned me

But stand by her grave and think of her

as of a child:

Little child, you anxious innocent

Little moth who burns its feet off

landing on the lightbulb

Little know-nothing know-nothing-flower.

Just-don’t-have-the-strength-to-flower-anymore-flower

Obstinate I-just-want-to-die-child

Obstinate you-don’t-know-how-to-hold-me-child

Be mother’s mother, not grieve with a child’s tears

Grieve with wise tears

Is that possible?

I stumbled over her in the grass and examined the body.

I touched her with my hand. Her skin was cold and

yielding. I took her in with my gaze. Her facial expressions

were that of a doll. I put my ear to her chest.

She had no heartbeat or her heart had been moved

somewhere else.

She reminded me of an abandoned tightrope which had lain

in the leaves through the night. Damp with dew. Its springiness gone.

She smelled like grass.