

IMME:

Laksmi Pamuntjak's text from 12 images of a young woman's journey
by Marij Nielen

1.

And so a young woman flees and takes a dive. The final arch resembles the trail of a sash. Later people refer to this moment as the blue hour. A kind of swift indigo, fragile but determined.

She herself is barely assembled, sort of loosely stitched together. There is so much noise in her head, and words seem not her own. It is so dark in these strange blue depths she feels her chest clenched. Her nostrils flaring, and drawing only water. She can't even tell whether she is imprisoned or set free. Later she learns to bob up like a dolphin, leaving messages at every shore.

But soon colours appear, then forms, and she feels something gathering about her. Words. Perhaps even music. Imagine that, flapping and flailing under water, yet echoing the song of anemones. Later, some hours into the sonorous unknown, she realises the heavy footsteps on the shoreline have gone stone quiet.

She is taken by surprise. She feels her first smile in months.

2.

It is with an elation bordering on madness that she mounts the technicolour turtle on an island at the edge of the world. There is something soothing in the giant creature's lumber, in the way he grazes the lip of the earth as though oblivious of its twists and turns, its rumbling innards. She feels solid on the carapace of his body; she feels loved after so many days at sea.

Are you in love with me? she asks.
No, he says, but this helps. This calm.

She considers this. Her mind wanders home, to the sound of broken glass scraped off the floor, her mother falling without words. The coldness of her father, his grating footsteps.

Which country are we in?
An ocean country.

She stops, needing no further reply.

Look, she says. There's a bunch of bananas in the near horizon.
She is not unhappy.

The turtle motions towards the golden miracle, laps it up, then takes it under one of its enormous webbed feet. For a while, it looks as though he has extra flippers. What the soul needs, it uses, he says. And so they heave along the new world, like two alphabets lost in space, light as birds.

3.

At first, the crack in the passageway is barely a slit. An imperceptible tearing, surprised by its own curiosity. It must be a new season. She is fascinated by how strong she is, prying a place open like a dream.

She has long had a mortal fear of doors, of the secrets behind them she'd rather they keep to themselves. There is a fine line between curious and grasping, and she prefers the not really knowing.

But it's too late. Grazing on the sand is a large, pink, four-legged animal. He has a tiny voice for his size, and words fly before him like the ceramic jugs tied to his rump. They are my guardian angels, he says. My two arms, my conscience. Listen to their tingling.

The idea of the denuded nude. She says. What do you think of it? Is it perhaps something close to the idea of a woman without a man?

The animal, which in a certain light can almost pass as an elephant, groans. *What are you?* he asks her.

Taken aback, she gazes at her own glassy reflection on the ancient wall. Tan face, tan arms, tan mouth hiding a purple, lolling tongue. Beware, she barks back. I am not who you think I am. We never are.

Meanwhile, the animal reminds her of a faithful pet: jester, gatekeeper of families.

4.

After days of combing the beach – yes, for beaches exist to be combed – she discovers beneath the rubble where sand meets water an amulet from her childhood. It is a gift from her mother, the one intended for her father's girlfriend, which she somehow lost at sea. But since a woman cannot be in two places at the same time, her mother had needed her help in determining the time of death.

She has always been a good rover and doesn't mind the bother. But here something else catches her attention: all the buildings further inshore are eerily quiet. They are not so much old or abandoned or run down as muffled, shuttered, clamped down. It is as if people have retreated into the floors and the walls, jam-packed into a colossal phantom breath.

But she has no time for musings. She is hardly even aware of the animal behind her, planting jugs in the soil with its ridiculous long trunk. Later she realizes the jugs have quadrupled in size.

I am digging out things, she says, to no one in particular, the trace of what escapes us. I want to find out what happened, what we traversed and what decided us, what impaled us and what turned our world around. What halted, grazed and passed us by. That whole idea, for instance: of daughters ransoming their mothers.

5.

The afternoon has the quality of a miracle. The dolphin she glimpsed earlier on turtleback must have followed her to the pier. Its skin is as smooth as a newborn's, its eyes kohl and liquid, competing with the flesh of its mouth. Somewhere between the tightness and the lax, something about her feels wise.

Time slips by. Someone has forgotten his shoes on the floorboards. They lay propped against the wooden plank on which she has been resting her tired legs. The sight momentarily halts her. She could have been elsewhere in the world; perhaps sometime early in the morning, when the light is non-committal and the world is watercolor. But all her life she has worked hard toward this hour. She is dying to be alone with her body. She is tired of telling stories. It reminds her too much of lovemaking – the foreplay, the wordplay, the play at the core, like an exam to be passed. Like philosophy masquerading as a novel.

The sea gathers the last of twilight. The seagulls stop on their track, a collective strike. *The north is our mother, they whisper, the source of our flight.*

She wants to feel how it is, to be the blossom of a woman, born into the whole of the air.
It is a brief time, here.

6.

The sky is orange. It is time. It first appeared as a tiny sparkle, like the sunrise you had not expected on a pair of lovers' foreign sky. The skyscrapers have a panicky, anarchic quality. It is a new city, she later realises, as new as her own body. She smiles again. This time, not being under water helps.

She can hear shortwave smiles in the air. AM, FM. They contain all the sorrows and repairs of the year. Yet she knows she owes the world nothing, other than her doubt and unquiet. Her plenitude.

And so she takes a dive, and feels herself bounce. Soon there is no surface, just her body and a giant hammock that receives her like a benign aunt against the cold, hard grey of parental doubt. She is grateful for this respite, and feels herself soar higher and higher. But she sees no need to give thanks.

Occasionally a bird of paradise flies past, its trace billowing softly like a brilliant viridian sash that in certain countries would cause religions to be established in her honour.

At some point, in that altitude, she realizes she's back in the pellucid beauty of the ocean's deepest floor. She sees everything, wants everything. Rain, silence, dawn, light's ferocious rip in an overcast sky. All the spare parts and shiny water.

7.

In retrospect, it might have been the birds that brought her to land, to the ivory of a beach, to the miracle of earth's green. They are all the things you can't find in the air, the trees whisper, as her face widens with surprise.

Little wonder then, that men and women come drifting in from the sea. They come to stay while free-spirited girls would not keep still. They dance to their own tune. They run to the farthest point of the island and start etching their every move on the soil - every brisé, chassé and battement, every shimmering, shivering, shimmying detail.

Does this, too, happen to her? Well, not entirely. She goes through those self-same motions but with a heavy soul. Because sand, she says, is as fickle as light. Yet she will not trade her loneliness with community, her unknowing with the all-seeing. Dancing means never to drown, never to be glued to someone else's pain.

Later, ensnared into the hour of silt, she is finally spent. She becomes a tad morose. What does it mean, she asks into the air. The phrase ‘down here’? “To come back to earth”? Silence grins at her, like a new wound, a new dawning.

And so she sits there, rooted on the same spot. Bouldered at the rump, as though to a homeland.

8.

She rises the next morning and feels that familiar pull again. To reach. To feel the lift of the air.

A shard of light falls upon a celestial rope hanging over the rooftop. She marvels at how she has missed it all this time, even though it has been around since the beginning. As if to remind herself of the soil beneath her feet, she packs a giant radish with a single bright leaf jutting out of her satchel like a beautiful feather. It feels right on her back, a ballast. A gift from God’s palette.

In dreams as in her waking hours, she sees herself climbing and climbing, towards a memory from her childhood night table. She’d shut herself in and wait for her parents to pry it open – to prove that despite her being in place she still doesn’t fit in. But often she climbs because somewhere out there sit her parents, believing, and believing, that some day, against their better judgment, she can rise above the fray, be this splendid soaring star, and still not be lost to them. For isn’t that what matters? Being young she did not argue; she did not have a reason to.

She feels herself ascending. *Living is not enough, it is necessary to set fire, climb the flames.*

9.

In tonight’s fitful dream she sees her father open the box. Instead of shoving her in, as he often did when she broke a rule, he pulls the contents out. There is no mercy in this. A jumble of images, but each distinct, immutable.

Elephant. Key. Dolphin. Turtle. Scoop. Leaf. Bananas.

Like thought bubbles. Like names.

She stirs to the sound of the morning. She tries to open her eyes, but her top and bottom eyelashes are crusted together. The dream tastes bitter in her mouth, tiny droplets of bile

spread over the stale bread that is her tongue. She feels empty-eyed, as though all the seeing granted her had taken place in sleep.

And then she sees it – the frog. For a moment, she feels like going back into the box. In Kafka, the two nightmares – one claustrophobic, the other agoraphobic – are really the same nightmare; and it doesn't end when morning comes. Why should hers be different?

It takes some time for her to realize that the frog is talking to her. Like all the other creatures, it is a he. He has enormous toe pads and webbed feet, and his call alternates between a goat's and a cow's. He tells her that sleep is remembering. A kind of prayer. Yet her journey has hardly ended.

10.

As usual, there's always that one other thing to do. You're always *almost* there, to depart not to arrive. Nothing is ever really laid to rest.

It is the hour of striving, the snake tells her after swallowing the frog. Useless creature, the snake says later of his meal. Frogs are only fit for folklore; they lead half-lives, dwellers of the neither here-nor-there. Meanwhile, I give people back their memories. Dream is my dominion.

As for you, there is a reason why you've reached this point in your journey. That reason is there – in that city in the hill. It is there that you have to go, while ordinary folks go about their daily business of living, of making love to their tools.

The distance between you and the city is an archipelago. Like every journey, it is the crimped surface between hell and heaven, sweet and sour, light and dark. It is the bated breath between fire and ice, speed and sloth; every ripple in the silences of water. It is the trench between old and new, here and there—soft, hard, inviolate. And you will cherish every moment of this reaching out, the way you will be forced, one day, to love love for love itself.

It's a difficult moment.

11.

She's seen this in a dream. She's standing in the doorway and being asked to choose, between life or religion, and she is as slow as a dewdrop. But she moves, anyway, towards the latter, for there has to be something there: a colour, a bouquet, music.

Something to make her *believe*. And so she delivers herself—to this huge machinery, like a bride to an altar, a child to her parents' tomb.

Like an egg, she feels coddled, safe, native. She is like a tongue folded back on itself. A cast-off dog allowed to return. But she is also salt. She sparkles and dissolves. She greases and crackles. She doesn't know how to flow the way her mother has taught her to. So she bites and only then does she cry. She is grateful. She is saying, *where have I been, all this time?* For here I am, gathered together, in childbirth as well as dischildbirth; I have been found all along.

She knows the dead don't talk. But most of them have lived the life of rubble. Strawn and charred and old and irrelevant they stand before her like ghostly sages. It is a moment of reckoning. So she drops into prayer, as though at the foot of an ancestral shrine.

12.

It all seems to have begun here, or somewhere not unlike this place. It is morning, and the sun feels warm on her cheeks, her neck, like the breath of the prodigal lover. She does not turn around for fear of losing the rightness. She remembers a man she used to love silently, someone who had had his face transfigured rather than escaped hunger in a fascist's prison. She feels reborn.

It is possible that today is Wednesday. The English believe that the Wednesday child is born to misery. She merely thinks she is midweek.

She feels the elephant's presence behind her. And the turtle, his shell glistening like leather. All the best feelings of the past few weeks are close to her skin, the way one chooses a screensaver and feels good about it all year. She feels her cup is almost full, her book written at full speed. She feels everything rises from the deepest waters within her, herself part of a happy family.

The next time we see her, she is taking a dive. Yet she stands forever in awe at her eternal longing for this feeling, just as she is forever a baby crawling towards a bright and dashing colour—away, away from her father's stealth-bomb boots and her mother's pale and anxious arms.

Sydney, February 2009

IMME:

Tafsir Laksmi Pamuntjak atas 12 gambar perjalanan seorang perempuan muda oleh Marij Nielen

1.

Maka perempuan muda itu kabur dan menyelam. Busur penghabisannya menyerupai alur sehelai pita. Kelak orang menyebut saat itu sebagai waktu biru. Seperti nila yang lekas, ringkih tapi gigih.

Ia sendiri tak utuh-penuh, seperti terjahit longgar. Bising memenuhi kepalanya, dan kata-kata seolah bukan miliknya. Kedalaman biru yang aneh ini begitu gelapnya; ia merasa dadanya sesak. Cuping hidungnya melebar, dan mengisap air semata. Ia bahkan tak tahu apakah ia terperjara atau terbebaskan. Tapi ia lalu belajar muncul ke permukaan seperti lumba-lumba, meninggalkan pesan di tiap pesisir.

Kemudian muncul warna, lalu bentuk, dan ia merasa ada sesuatu berhimpun di sekitarnya. Kata-kata. Mungkin bahkan musik. Bayangkan: meronta dan menggeletar dalam air, tapi toh menggemakan lagu para anemon. Belakangan, selang sekian jam dalam gaung asing itu, ia sadar langkah berat di garis pantai telah membisu.

Ia terkejut. Ia merasakan senyum pertamanya setelah berbulan-bulan.

2.

Dengan lega yang mendekati gila, ia menunggangi penyu berwarna cemerlang di sebuah pulau di ujung dunia. Ada sesuatu yang menenangkan dalam langkah pelan makhluk raksasa itu, dalam caranya meragut tubir bumi, seolah tak sadar akan segala kelok dan likunya, akan isi perutnya yang gemuruh. Ia merasa mantap pada perisai tubuh sang penyu; ia merasa dicintai setelah berhari-hari di laut.

Apakah kau mencintaiku? sang perempuan bertanya.

Tidak, jawab sang penyu, tapi ini menolong. Ketenangan ini.

Sang perempuan terpekur. Pikirannya bergulir ke rumah, ke suara pecahan kaca yang disapu membarut lantai, ibunya yang jatuh tanpa kata-kata. Dingin ayahnya, derit langkahnya yang kasar.

Di negeri manakah kita?
Negeri samudra.

Sang perempuan berhenti, tak memerlukan lagi jawaban.

Lihat, katanya. Ada setandan pisang di depan sana.
Ia bukan tak bahagia.

Sang penyuh bergerak ke arah keajaiban emas itu, melahapnya, lantas meletakkannya di bawah salah satu kaki raksasanya yang berselaput. Untuk beberapa saat, tampak seolah dia punya kaki tambahan. Apa yang diperlukan oleh jiwa, akan ia pakai, kata sang penyuh. Maka mereka bergerak menyusuri dunia baru itu, seakan dua aksara raib di angkasa, ringan seperti burung.

3.

Mulanya, rekahan di jalan masuk itu hanyalah torehan tipis. Celah yang tak terlihat, seakan kaget akan kemelitannya sendiri. Ini pasti musim baru. Ia terpesona akan kekuatan dirinya sendiri, menguakkan suatu tempat bagai mimpi.

Sejak lama ia punya ketakutan dahsyat akan pintu-pintu, akan rahasia di baliknya yang ia ingin mereka simpan saja rapat-rapat. Ada garis tipis antara melit dan tamak, dan ia lebih suka ketaksungguhtahuan.

Tapi terlambat sudah. Seekor hewan besar merah-dadu berkaki empat meragut di pasir. Suaranya kecil untuk ukuran tubuhnya, dan kata-kata beterbangan di hadapannya, seperti teko-teko keramik yang terikat di bokongnya. Mereka malaikat penjagaku, katanya. Kedua lenganku, kesadaranku. Dengarkan mereka berdenting.

Ide tentang si bugil yang ditelanjangi. Ia berkata. Apa pendapatmu? Apakah mirip ide tentang perempuan tanpa lelaki?

Sang hewan, yang dalam cahaya tertentu nyaris seperti gajah, melenguh. *Apakah kamu ini?* dia bertanya pada sang perempuan.

Terkejut, ia menatap pantulan dirinya di dinding tua. Wajah terlayur, tangan terlayur, mulut terlayur menyembunyikan lidah ungu menggantung. Awas, ia menyalak balik. Aku bukanlah yang sosok yang kau kira. Kita tak pernah begitu.

Sementara itu, sang binatang mengingatkannya pada hewan peliharaan yang setia: penghibur dan penjaga keluarga.

4.

Setelah sehari-hari menyisir pantai—ya, karena pantai ada untuk disisir—di balik reruntuhan tempat pasir bertemu air ia menemukan jimat dari masa kecilnya. Hadiah dari ibunya, yang dimaksudkan untuk kekasih ayahnya, dan yang entah bagaimana ia hilangkan di laut. Tapi karena seorang perempuan tak bisa berada di dua tempat sekaligus, ibunya membutuhkan bantuannya untuk menentukan waktu kematian.

Ia memang pengelana yang baik, dan tak terusik oleh gangguan itu. Tapi ada yang lain yang menarik perhatiannya di sini: semua bangunan di pedalaman sunyi itu membuat giris. Bukan ditinggalkan atau rusak, tapi lebih terbekap, tertutup, tertekan. Seakan manusia telah menarik diri memasuki lantai dan dinding-dinding, berdesakan dalam setarik napas danyang raksasa.

Tapi ia tak punya waktu untuk merenung. Ia bahkan nyaris tak sadar bahwa hewan di belakangnya sibuk menanam teko dalam tanah dengan belalai panjangnya yang konyol. Belakangan ia sadar ukuran teko-teko itu telah berlipat ganda.

Aku menggali hal ikhwal, katanya bukan kepada siapa-siapa, aku menggali jejak dari yang kita lupakan. Aku ingin tahu apa yang terjadi, apa yang kita lalui, apa yang membuat kita memutuskan. Apa yang menombak kita, apa yang membuat dunia kita berputar. Apa yang menghentikan, meragut, dan melampaui kita. Pemikiran itu, misalnya: para putri yang membebaskan ibu mereka.

5.

Senja itu terasa ajaib. Lumba-lumba yang ia lihat sebelumnya saat di punggung penyu pasti telah mengikutinya sampai dermaga. Kulit lumba-lumba itu semulus kulit bayi, matanya bercelak dan cair, bersaing dengan daging di mulutnya. Antara tegang dan santai, ada yang terasa bijak pada dirinya.

Waktu berlalu. Seseorang melupakan sepatunya di papan lantai, tersandar pada papan-papan kayu tempat ia mengistirahatkan kakinya yang letih. Pemandangan itu menghentikannya sementara. Ia bisa saja berada di tempat lain di dunia; mungkin suatu saat di pagi hari, saat cahaya masih masa-bodoh dan dunia berwarna cat air. Tapi seumur

hidupnya ia telah bekerja keras demi saat ini. Ia sangat ingin sendiri dengan tubuhnya. Ia lelah mengisahkan dongeng. Itu terlalu mengingatkannya pada bercinta—permainan awal, permainan kata, permainan inti, seperti ujian yang harus ditempuh. Seperti filsafat berlagak sebagai novel.

Laut mengumpulkan cahaya senja terakhir. Camar berhenti bergerak, aksi mogok bersama. *Utara adalah ibu kami*, bisik mereka, *sumber pelayangan kami*.

Ia ingin mencecap bagaimana rasanya menjadi perempuan kusuma, lahir dalam udara yang utuh-seluruh. *Waktu yang singkat di sini, kini*.

6.

Langit jingga. Sudah waktunya. Mulanya ia muncul sebagai kerlap mungil, seperti matahari terbit yang tak kaukira muncul di langit asing sepasang kekasih. Pencakar-pencakar langit terlihat panik, anarkis. Ini kota yang baru, ia sadar kemudian, sebaru tubuhnya. Ia tersenyum lagi. Kali ini terbantu oleh kondisinya yang tak berada dalam air.

Ia dapat mendengar senyuman gelombang pendek di udara. AM, FM. Mengandung segala duka dan tobat tahun itu. Tapi ia tahu ia tak berutang apa pun pada dunia, selain ragu dan galaunya. Kepenuhannya.

Maka ia menyelam, dan merasa dirinya melanting. Segera tak ada lagi permukaan, hanya tubuhnya dan ranjang ayun raksasa yang menangkapnya seperti seorang bibi hangat berlatar ragu orangtua yang dingin, keras, kelabu. Ia bersyukur atas rehat ini, dan merasa dirinya membubung terus meninggi. Tapi ia tak merasa perlu mengucapkan terima kasih.

Sesekali seekor cendrawasih terbang lewat, jejaknya megar halus seperti pita hijau cemerlang yang di beberapa negeri dapat membuat orang mendirikan agama untuk menghormatinya.

Pada suatu titik, di ketinggian itu, ia sadar bahwa ia telah kembali ke keindahan bening dasar laut terdalam. Ia melihat segalanya, menginginkan segalanya. Hujan, keheningan, dini hari, robek brutal cahaya di langit mendung. Semua bagian serep dan air yang berkilauan.

7.

Dalam kilas balik, mungkin saja para burung yang telah membawanya ke daratan, ke pantai gading, ke keajaibanhijau bumi. Ini semua hal yang tak bisa kautemukan di udara, pohon-pohon pun berbisik, saat wajahnya melebar terperangah.

Maka tak heran para lelaki dan perempuan datang terapung-apung dari lautan. Mereka tiba untuk tinggal, sementara anak-anak perempuan berjiwa bebas tak sudi diam. Mereka menari menurut lagu mereka sendiri. Mereka berlari ke titik terjauh di pulau dan mulai mengukir setiap gerak mereka di tanah—setiap *brisé*, *chassé*, dan *battement*, setiap rinci yang berkilau, bergetar, menggeletar.

Apakah ini juga terjadi padanya? Ya, meski tak sepenuhnya. Ia juga melalui semua gerakan itu, tapi dengan jiwa berat. Karena pasir, ujarnya, secacau cahaya. Tapi ia tak mau menukar kesepiannya dengan paguyuban, ketaktahuannya dengan keserbatahuan. Menari berarti takkan pernah tenggelam, takkan pernah terikat pada pedih orang lain.

Kemudian, terperangkap jam lumpur, ia akhirnya letih. Dan sedikit sedih. Apa artinya, ia bertanya pada angin, ungkapan “di bawah sini”? “Pulang ke bumi”? Sunyi menyeringai padanya, seolah luka baru, subuh baru.

Maka ia duduk di sana, terpaku di titik yang sama. Terpacak di pantat, seolah pada tanah air.

8.

Ia terbangun pagi berikutnya dan merasakan tarikan akrab itu lagi. Untuk menggapai. Untuk mencecap dorongan udara.

Seberkas cahaya jatuh pada tali langit yang menggantung di atas tingkap. Ia terpesona betapa ia tak melihatnya selama ini, meskipun tali itu ada sedari mula. Seakan untuk mengingatkannya pada tanah di bawah kakinya, ia mengemas bit raksasa dengan sehelai daun tunggal gemerlap menyembul keluar ranselnya, seperti bulu elok. Terasa tepat di punggungnya, sebetulnya penyeimbang. Hadiah dari palet Tuhan.

Dalam mimpi juga dalam jaga, ia melihat dirinya mendaki dan mendaki, menuju kenangan meja malam masa kanak-kanaknya. Ia mengunci diri di dalamnya dan menunggu orangtuanya menguaknya—untuk membuktikan bahwa meski ia di tempat yang seharusnya, ia tetap saja seorang asing. Tapi sering ia mendaki karena di suatu tempat nun jauh di sana, orangtuanya duduk, percaya dan terus percaya, bahwa suatu hari, di luar perkiraan mereka, ia akan bangkit melampaui semua, menjadi bintang gemilang yang mencuat, yang entah bagaimana tetap tak lepas dari mereka. Karena bukankah hanya itu yang penting? Tapi berhubung ia masih cilik, ia tak mendebat; ia tak punya alasan untuk itu.

Ia merasa dirinya meninggi. *Hidup saja tak cukup, kita perlu memantik api, memanjat lidah-lidahnya.*

9.

Dalam mimpi gelisah malam itu, ia melihat bapaknya membuka peti. Alih-alih mendorongnya masuk, seperti yang biasa bapaknya lakukan saat ia melanggar peraturan, sang bapak mengeluarkan isi peti. Tak ada ampun. Serumpun citra, tapi masing-masing tegas, tetap.

Gajah. Kunci. Lumba-lumba. Penyu. Penyauk. Daun. Pisang.

Seperti balon pikiran. Seperti nama-nama.

Ia terbangun oleh suara pagi. Ia berusaha membuka mata, tapi bulumata atas dan bawahnya mengerak lengket. Mimpi itu terasa pahit di mulutnya, tetes-tetes kecil empedu yang tersebar pada lidah roti basinya. Ia merasa matanya kosong, seolah semua penglihatan yang diberikan kepadanya telah terhampar dalam tidurnya.

Lalu ia melihatnya—katak itu. Saat itu, ia merasa seperti kembali ke peti. Dalam otak Kafka, dua mimpi buruk—satu klaustrofobik, yang lain agorafobik—sesungguhnya satu mimpi yang sama; dan tak berakhir saat pagi tiba. Mengapa mimpinya harus berbeda?

Setelah beberapa saat, ia sadar katak itu bicara kepadanya. Seperti makhluk lainnya, katak itu lelaki. Tapaknya raksasa dan kakinya berselaput, dan suaranya silih berganti--antara embik kuda dan lenguh sapi. Tidur adalah mengingat, kata si katak kepadanya. Ia semacam doa. Namun perempuan itu tahu, perjalanannya sama sekali belum berakhir.

10.

Seperti biasa, selalu ada satu hal lagi yang masih harus dilakukan. Kau selalu *hampir* sampai: untuk berangkat, bukan untuk tiba. Tak ada yang sungguh-sungguh tuntas.

Inilah jam perjuangan, sang ular mendesis kepadanya setelah melahap sang katak. Makhluk tak berguna, ujar sang ular kemudian mengenai makanannya. Katak hanya cocok buat dongeng; mereka punya separuh-hidup, penduduk dari yang-bukan-di-sini dan yang- bukan-di-sana. Sementara itu, aku mengembalikan ingatan kepada manusia. Mimpi adalah wilayahku.

Akan halnya dirimu, tentu ada alasan mengapa kau sampai pada titik ini dalam perjalananmu. Alasan itu ada di sana—di kota di bukit itu. Ke sanalah kau harus pergi. Dan biarkanlah orang-orang biasa mengurus hidupnya sehari-hari, bercinta dengan perkakas mereka.

Jarak antara dirimu dan kota itu adalah satu kepulauan. Seperti semua perjalanan, ia adalah tekukan antara surga dan neraka, manis dan asam, terang dan gelap. Ia adalah napas tertahan antara api dan es, cepat dan lambat; semua riak dalam kebisuan air. Ia adalah parit antara yang lama dan yang baru, di sini dan di sana—lembut, keras, murni. Dan kau akan menikmati setiap saat dalam penggapaian ini, sebagaimana kau akan dipaksa, suatu hari nanti, untuk mencintai cinta demi cinta itu sendiri.

Saat yang sulit.

11.

Ia telah melihat ini dalam mimpi. Ia berdiri di pintu masuk dan diminta memilih, antara hidup dan agama, dan ia merasa dirinya pelan, sepelan tetes embun. Tapi toh ia bergerak juga, menuju pilihan kedua, karena pasti ada sesuatu di sana: warna, rangkaian bunga, musik. Sesuatu untuk membuatnya *percaya*. Maka ia menyerahkan diri—kepada mesin itu, seperti pengantin ke altar, anak ke makam orangtuanya.

Seperti telur, ia merasa dimanja, aman, asli. Ia seolah lidah terlipat balik. Anjing terusir yang diizinkan pulang. Tapi ia juga garam. Ia berkilau dan melebur. Ia mendesis dan meletup. Ia tak tahu cara mengalir seperti yang diajarkan ibunya. Maka ia menggigit, dan baru setelah itu ia menangis. Ia bersyukur. Ia berkata, *ke mana saja aku, selama ini?* Karena di sinilah aku, utuh, dalam kelahiran dan ketaklahiran; selama-lamanya aku telah ditemukan.

Ia tahu orang mati tak bicara. Tapi kebanyakan dari mereka menempuh hidup reruntuhan. Terserak dan terbakar dan tua dan tak penting, mereka berdiri di hadapannya seperti hantu-hantu orang bijak. Inilah saat perhitungan. Maka ia berlutut dalam doa, seolah di kaki kuil leluhur.

12.

Semua seperti bermula di sini, atau di suatu tempat yang mirip tempat ini. Pagi hari, dan matahari terasa hangat di pipinya, lehernya, seperti napas kekasih yang lama hilang. Ia tak menoleh karena takut kehilangan perasaan benar itu. Ia ingat lelaki yang pernah ia

cintai dalam diam, seseorang yang membiarkan wajahnya bonyok ketimbang melarikan diri dari jerat lapar dalam penjara kaum fasis. Ia merasa terlahir kembali.

Mungkin hari ini Rabu. Orang Inggris percaya bahwa anak yang lahir Rabu lahir untuk berduka. Ia hanya berpikir ia tengah minggu.

Ia merasakan kehadiran sang gajah di belakangnya. Dan sang penyu: perisainya berkilau seolah kulit. Semua perasaan terbaik dalam minggu-minggu lalu dekat di kulitnya, tak ubahnya saat orang memilih *screensaver* dan dibuat girang olehnya sepanjang tahun. Ia merasa cangkirnya nyaris melimpah, bukunya ditulis dalam kecepatan penuh. Ia merasa segala apa bangkit dari samudra terdalam dirinya, dan ia adalah bagian dari keluarga bahagia.

Saat kita bertemu lagi dengan perempuan itu, ia sedang terjun menyelam. Tapi ia selamanya berdiri kagum akan kerinduan abadinya pada perasaan ini, sebagaimana ia selamanya bayi yang merangkak ke arah warna terang gemilang—menjauh, menjauh dari sepatu bot siluman ayahnya serta lengan pucat pasi ibunya.

Alih bahasa: Rani Elsanti dan Laksmi Pamuntjak